

Mountain Dhamma

A Collection of Dhamma Talks

By

Ajaan Suchart Abhijāto

For Free Distribution



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“The Gift of Dhamma Excels All Other Gifts”

- The Lord Buddha

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Visiting the Cemetery

February 31, 2013

Today lots of people have come because of the *Qing Ming* Festival. On Saturday and Sunday families will visit the graves of their relatives. The intention to visit the cemetery is different for monks and laypeople. Laypeople visit to remember those who have benefited them in the past, such as their father, mother, or grandparents. Monks, though, visit to consider their future: If their bodies are not cremated first, they too will one day be buried in the ground.

We visit the graveyard to develop mindfulness of death. Death is the one thing that we will definitely experience in the future. Our bodies will have to breakdown, following the laws of nature. This body is part of nature, made up of earth, water, wind, and fire, which are themselves natural phenomena that are unstable and always in the process of coming together and falling apart. Take water as an example: Vapour in the air condenses and falls down as rain. It then evaporates

into the air, forming clouds before falling down again as rain.

Earth, water, wind, and fire gather together to produce animal and human bodies. Animals are really just earth, water, wind, and fire, as are the bodies of human beings. 'Water' is the liquid we drink all the time. 'Wind' is the air we continuously breathe. 'Earth' is the food we eat three or four times a day, including whatever desserts we eat in the evening. All this food mostly comes from the earth, such as rice that grows from the ground. The various desserts made from rice similarly come from the earth.

Earth, water, wind, and fire fill the body. The cohesive nature joining these elements weakens in time, but in the beginning these elements have the strength to come together and make the body grow. But once the body reaches its peak, the strength of adhesion between these four elements weakens. The forces that separate the four elements increase. The body that grew bigger and stronger then begins to decline, becoming weaker

and frailer, step by step, until in the end the elements cannot stay together and must separate.

When a person first dies, fire is the first of the four elements to leave. If we touch their dead body, we find it stiff and cold. Then the air begins to seep out, which we detect as the stench of the body. That is followed by the water oozing out. If left for a long time, the body shrivels and dries up, becoming earth and dust.

This is how monks visit the cemetery, which is different from how laypeople go about it. When laypeople go, they do not see any corpses, but monks go in order to see the bodies of those who have passed away. At the time of the Buddha, people did not bury the corpses. They just left them in the cemetery to disintegrate and to be eaten by dogs, animals, or insects. Going to see a cemetery like this is for the purpose of developing wisdom. Wisdom in Buddhism is for the purpose of cutting off the defilements (*kilesas*), cutting off delusion, cutting off attachment and clinging, and cutting off desire.

‘Delusion’ is the wrong view that this body is ourselves and belongs to us, which causes attachment to the body and makes us want it to stay healthy for a long time. But when we visit the cemetery to see corpses, we will realise that this body will ultimately have to die. It will have to decay, and the four elements will separate to leave only the earth. The water seeps into the soil. Wind disperses into the air. The fire element disappears, leaving only the earth for us to see in a heap of bones.

Such images, if we see them often, will make a deep impression on the mind, causing us to see the truth and allowing us to let go of our attachment, because we see that the body is just the composition of earth, water, wind, and fire. If we are able to let go, we will not have any desire concerning the body, such as wanting the body not to grow old, get sick, or die. These are not things that go according to our wishes, so wanting them to be a certain way only causes us problems, because this desire is the cause of suffering in the heart.

It is this cause of suffering that the Buddha discovered on the night of his Awakening. All the human beings and animals in this world don't suffer from anything external; our suffering and discontentment arises merely out of our own desire. When desire arises, our mind becomes irritated, moody, and restless. For instance, when we think about the aging, sickness, and death that we experience as part of having a body, we will be uneasy if we still have not accepted this truth. We feel this way because we do not want the body to age, get sick, or die.

Our desire arises because we cling to the body as ourselves and as belonging to us, and we cling in this way because we lack wisdom. We do not see the truth that the body is simply the composition of earth, water, wind, and fire; it is not ourselves and does not belong to us. It is just a puppet given to us by our father and mother that we use to do all kinds of things and to take us to all sorts of places. Like today, you had the body take you to the temple. We use the body like a vehicle, as a tool of the mind.

The mind, though, is not the body. The mind is the master, and the body is the servant. The mind is us; we are the mind. We are the one who knows, the one who commands the body to do all kinds of things, giving orders via our thoughts.

When we do not understand the nature of the mind and the causes of joy and sadness, we often cause ourselves problems, because we deludedly attach to things in this world that we think will give us happiness. We think that having a body lets us do all sorts of things and brings us great satisfaction, so we end up thinking that the body is our self and belongs to us. We want it to live for a long time without it aging, getting sick, or dying. But the nature of the body is such that it cycles through birth, sickness, aging, and death. If we do not see this truth, or if we choose to remain blind to it, then we will fear aging, sickness, pain, and death. However, if we contemplate it regularly, seeing that no matter what, we definitely have to age, get sick, and die, regardless of what we might want, then we will be able to accept the truth.

Once we accept this reality, we will not fear aging, sickness, or death. We will be able to let go of the body and be unaffected by aging, sickness, or death. This is one benefit that we get from visiting the cemetery and looking at things from a Buddhist perspective. We should bring the image of a corpse inside, comparing it to our own body. We teach our mind that in the future our body will also end up in the cemetery and be a corpse just like those we have seen.

If we are able to see this, the mind can become calm, let go, stay happy and be at ease, without any stress or fear concerning the body. It will not worry about when and where the body might die. It will not fear pain, sickness, or aging, because it knows that the mind is not the body. The mind just looks after the body. When the body grows old, the mind does not grow old with it. When the body experiences pain, the mind does not experience pain along with it. It is only when there is desire that the mind suffers along with the body.

For instance, suppose there is pain in the body and the desire arises in the mind for the pain to disappear. This desire gives rise to another type of pain on the mental level, resulting in two types of pain: physical and mental. If we have practiced well and trained our mind, then we can let go of the physical pain and simply acknowledge it with equanimity, with the understanding that it is only physical pain — not mental — and that it cannot affect the mind. We know that mental pain arises only from the desire for the pain to disappear or from the desire to escape the pain. This desire gives rise to a mental type of pain that is quite intense and far outweighs the physical pain.

Those who know this truth will be able to control mental pain and be unfazed by bodily aches and pains. There is no anxiety, because physical pain is so insignificant. Mental pain, while significant, is preventable if we can control the mind, making it still and calm, thereby not allowing desire to arise. We accomplish this by continuously developing the power of mindfulness (*satī*), concentration (*samādhī*), and wisdom (*paññā*), to see

pain as not-self (*anattā*), as not under our control. We can't stop the physical pain, so if the body hurts, we just have to let it be. Like the noises that we hear right now: we cannot command them to stop, so even if they are loud, we have to let them be. If our mind does not want them to stop, we will not be agitated. If we want them to stop, agitation will arise in our mind, and we will immediately feel irritated.

It is the same with physical pain. When we want it to disappear, agitation and stress arise in our mind, which is many times more painful than only the physical pain by itself. So having studied and practised the Buddha's teachings, we will be able make our mind equanimous and to let go of every single thing. If we have wisdom, concentration, and mindfulness, we will see that everything is not-self. That is, all things lie outside our sphere of influence, so that we cannot command them to be one way or another. For instance, we cannot order the body not to age, not to get sick, or not to die. Similarly, whether we like the sounds that we hear or not, we have to hear them all the same. We have to

hear ones we like and ones we dislike, such as praise and criticism.

When someone praises us, we become happy because we like it. But, if someone criticises us, we become upset because we dislike it. However, if we have wisdom, mindfulness, and concentration, we will be able to establish our mind in equanimity and accept whatever people say to us, whether praise or criticism, because we are not able to control what people say. In the same way, nothing in this world is really under our control. It is not always possible to get people to do what we want. There are times when we can, and there are times when we can't. When we cannot, we should simply accept things as they are. There's no need to be bothered by what we can't change. For instance, when our children are young, we can teach them about anything and everything. They will readily believe what we tell them and follow our instructions, but once they grow older they will become more independent, with their own feelings and thoughts. Sometimes when we try to teach them to do something they will not follow our

instructions. So we have to accept the fact that they too are *anattā*; they are not really *our* children and don't really belong to us. We cannot stop them from pursuing their own path, and one day they will eventually leave us to live with others. They will start their own family with their spouse. The day will come when they will have to get old, get sick, and die just like all the rest of us.

This is how to see things with wisdom. If we have wisdom, our mind will stay detached in equanimity, impartial towards all things, not pleased or displeased because we know that we cannot control or change other people. If the desire to change someone else arises, then suffering arises right along with it.

This is the truth that no one knew before the Buddha was able to discover it for himself when he gained insight into the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is that of *dukkha*, translated variously as suffering, discontentment, or stress. The Second Truth is seeing that suffering is caused by our own desire. When we desire anything, our mind instantly becomes restless

because we have yet to acquire it. If we are not able to acquire it, we again become upset. If, on the other hand, we successfully fulfil our desire, we will be delighted, but soon we will again feel uneasy when we worry that what we have gained will not stay with us for long. This is the suffering we experience as a result of desire. Whatever it is that we want cannot always remain under our control. Having obtained something, we may lose it after only a few days.

However, if we have wisdom, we will have the Eightfold Noble Path (*magga*) as a tool to solve this problem. *Dukkha* is mental suffering and stress, and *samudaya* is the cause of *dukkha*. If we wish to extinguish *dukkha* which is called *nirodha* (the cessation of suffering), then we have to develop the path (*magga*), which is mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. If mindfulness is able to control our thinking, allowing the mind to be calm and teaching it to let go, we will not be bothered by anything.

The key here is to control our desire. Our desire arises because of our thinking. When we think about this or that, our desire runs after whatever we think about. Having thought about someone, we immediately want to go see them. Having thought about an issue, we immediately want it to be a certain way. Since there is desire, discontentment arises as well.

Instead, we should use wisdom to think that everything has to come and go according to its causes and supporting conditions, that we cannot always control these things. Sometimes we might be able to control them, but other times we cannot. For instance, at the moment we might be able to look after our health well enough so that we can do what we want. However, a day will come when our health fails, and we are sick or in pain. Wishing for the pain or sickness to go away does not help, so we have to go to the hospital to see a doctor for treatment and medication. We hope that the illness can be cured, and sometimes it can be and sometimes it cannot. If the illness cannot be treated, we

will have to live with it until the illness either resolves itself or worsens to the point of death.

This is the wisdom of the Buddhist path that teaches us to see everything in this world as impermanent, stressful, and not-self, to see that everything is transient and subject to change. There is progress as well as decline; things come and they go; there is birth and there is death. If we attach and cling to these things, we will be unhappy when they change, decline, or cease to exist, because we want them to always stay with us and never change or leave.

This wanting and not-wanting is what makes us unhappy. We desire things that are of the nature to always change, and unhappiness arises because those things are not-self (*anattā*); they are not under our control, and we cannot command them to be as we wish. Instead, if we see them as impermanent, stressful, and not-self, then we will be able to suppress our desire for those things and not be disturbed by them. Whether they stay or leave is their affair; whether they increase

or decline is their business. If we are able to apply these three perceptions (*ti-lakkhaṇa*) to everything, we will be able to let it all go. We will not have any desire for anything, but at the same time we can still live and act as we did before we knew that everything is impermanent, stressful, and not-self. The only difference is that now we don't desire things to be a certain way. We continue living with our families and friends, but we don't meddle in their affairs. However they are, we let them be, because we know that we cannot control or change them. In this way we can live happily with everyone.

These days we live together with conflict and discontentment, because we want people to be a certain way and to act according to our expectations. When they do not act as we wish, we become unhappy, and at times angry and frustrated. This is the result of our various desires that we fail to examine. If, though, we reflect on this continuously, in the future we won't dare to desire anything and will be content to live simply in line with our circumstances.

Questions & Answers

Question: In China, people follow the teachings of many different Buddhas and *Bodhisatvas*. Are those teachings the same as the ones we follow in Thailand?

Tan Ajaan: The teachings of the Buddhas are all the same even if there are hundreds of them. It is the same as with doctors: No matter how many doctors there are, they will all treat the flu in the same way, so you can go see any of them. Similarly, you can learn from any Buddha because they all teach the same thing, which boils down to three points: do good, give up evil, and purify your mind. These are the teachings of every Buddha. Therefore, it is not significant which Buddha you meet or choose to follow. Bowing, *wâiing*, and other gestures of respect are not the essence of the practice. The Buddha did not teach us to just show respect externally; he wanted us to really listen to his teaching. We don't pay respect like some people worship God. That's not correct. Buddha is not God. Buddha is a teacher, an Ajaan. People who go see the Buddha

should pay attention and listen to him in order to benefit from his teachings. Just bowing isn't enough. The Buddha said that even if someone was close enough to him that they could reach out and touch his robes, if they were not interested in Dhamma, it was like they were far, far away. However, if those who were thousands of miles away chose to learn and practise what he taught, it was as if they were in the presence of the Buddha himself. The proper way to approach the Buddha is with a determination to learn and study his teachings. Every Buddha is the same, whether it is Buddha Konāgamana or Buddha Matrieya, because they all gain enlightenment following the same path, using the same Four Noble Truths of *dukkha*, *samudaya*, *nirodha*, and *magga*. *Magga* (path) means to do good, to refrain from evil, and to purify your heart. Once *magga* is attained, desire can be discarded, and *dukkha* (discontentment) can be extinguished. Just these simple, short instructions are the teachings of the Buddhas that enable us to extinguish all *dukkha* from the heart.

Question: We are taught that the Buddha has already attained final *nibbāna* (enlightenment). But where did he go? This is not something we need to be interested in, right?

Tan Ajaan: This is to imagine what *nibbāna* is like, but actually it is inconceivable and thus not appropriate for us to dwell on. This is something we must know for ourselves, so we should practise and discover it through our own effort. People who have yet to develop their practise to the point of *nibbāna* will not know what *nibbāna* is like. However we describe it, whatever analogies we use, it is still not *nibbāna*. Therefore, we don't need to be too concerned about this.

The Buddha taught that our duty is to single-mindedly develop the path of practice. It is something we have to develop a lot. The eight-fold path consists of virtue, concentration, and wisdom, or generosity, virtue and meditation. We develop goodness, refrain from evil, and purify the heart. This is the path that will lead us to a realm beyond all suffering, where there is only

happiness that lasts for all eternity. This is something beyond our comprehension. It is similar to trying to speculate about a place without having actually been there. How can we get it right? We have to go there and see it with our own eyes. People who have been there return to tell us about it, but it isn't the same. So we have some idea of what it is like, but when we discover the truth ourselves, we learn that it is not as we have imagined. So do not waste time speculating about it because thinking about it is not the same as experiencing the real thing. Those who want the real thing should go ahead and meditate.

It is enough to know one thing: the Buddha still exists and has not gone anywhere. It is just that we cannot communicate with him where he is. Luangta (Maha Boowa) also still exists. His mind still exists. Our mind exists in the same way; it is just that when our body dies, our mind goes looking for a new body. But the minds of the Buddha and of Luangta, do not go seeking a new body. That's the difference. Our mind never dies; it is deathless just like the mind of the Buddha. What

distinguishes us is that the Buddhas and *Arahants* do not take on a body like we continue to do. We are not yet disenchanted with life. Once our body dies, we seek a new one and continue to carry it through the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Other than that, there is no difference.

Therefore, there is no need to fear that after enlightenment we will vanish. We are not annihilated; our mind does not disappear. It is just our stress and discontentment (*dukkha*) that disappears.

All minds, whether unenlightened like us or enlightened like the Buddha, are the same except that the mind of the Buddha is pure and free from defilements (*kilesas*). Our mind is not yet pure; it still has defilements, desire, and craving, so we take birth in a body to fulfil our desires. Wanting to see, hear, and experience the world, we need to have eyes, ears, a nose, tongue, and complete body. But there is great suffering that comes with a body because we have to take care of it, because it has to age, get sick, and die. What's different about

the minds of the Buddhas is that they don't have to have a body because they don't want to experience aging, sickness, and death. They don't want to have to feed and care for a body, to eat three meals a day, to do all these things that are such a heavy burden. It is better if we just stay mentally calm like the mind of the Buddha that always remains in a state of calm as if he was sitting in *samādhī* (concentration) all the time. He can do this because he does not have a body, but because we have a body, we cannot sit for too long. We need to change postures and leave meditation to look after our body.

Without a body, we can stay in *samādhī* for a thousand years or a million years. *Nibbāna* is just this state of calm, the peace of *samādhī*, a mind that is always still and calm. We call the permanent state of mental calm '*nibbāna*'.

We call the mental calm that is not yet permanent '*samādhī*.' For instance, after sitting in *samādhī* for a while the body cannot endure the pain, so we must

come out of it. Without a body, though, we can sit in *samādhi* for a very long time, because there is nothing to pull the mind out of *samādhi*. Our minds do not die, just like the minds of the Buddhas, but the difference is that we have to be born again, take care of another body, and experience all the suffering that that entails.

We will go on like this continuously until we reach *nibbāna*. So there is no need to fear that upon reaching *nibbāna* we will disappear. Some people think that we disappear after death, but they just do not see how it really is. Therefore, go ahead and practice because it leads only to happiness.

In contrast, right now we get only a little happiness by going someplace, and once it is over that happiness leaves us completely. We have to chase after this fleeting happiness again and again, going there, eating that, experiencing these same things hundreds and hundreds of times. After the happiness fades, we experience all kinds of problems, causing us to be unhappy and agitated all the time. Therefore, do not

think that being born again is a good thing, because really it is like returning to a cauldron of fire. Not taking birth again is like walking away from a cauldron of fire, an inferno of birth, aging, sickness, pain, and death. Birth, old age, sickness, pain, and death are all suffering, but we fail to see this. We do not see things with wisdom, so we think that birth is good because it allows us to do anything we want. But we do not see the dark side that is full of suffering, lamentation, grief, chaos, craziness, and people killing each other. Since we do not consider this aspect of life, we want to be born again. But after coming into this world we complain that it is full of pain and suffering, which we do not know what to do about. Without the Buddhist religion, there would be nobody to teach us. In this life we are fortunate to encounter Buddhism that teaches us how to escape this cauldron of suffering by doing good, refraining from evil, and purifying our heart.

May we all try to put these three points into practice. We do good things by helping others, sharing food, and being generous. If we have more than we need, we do

not have to save it away; we can share it with others instead, which will make us happy. We should maintain our virtue by not committing evil or harming others. Doing bad, unskilful things causes agitation, but if we are able to maintain our virtue, our mind will be cool and comfortable, having a certain level of happiness.

If we want even more happiness than that, we have to meditate, to clear away the defilements and gain mental calm. When the mind is calm, the defilements stop working. It feels as if the defilements are eliminated. This mental calm that arises out of *samādhī* cannot permanently destroy the defilements. It can only suppress them temporarily like a heavy rock that covers some weeds. As long as the rock is pressing down on the weeds nothing cannot grow, but once it has been removed the weeds will grow again. If we want the weeds gone for good, we need to uproot them. We can uproot the defilements using wisdom, because the root of defilement is delusion.

What is delusion? It is not seeing impermanence, stress, and not-self. If we are able to teach our mind to see the characteristics of impermanence, stress, and not-self, then delusion will disappear from our mind. Right now, we do not see that everything is impermanent, transient, and a cause of suffering, because of our desire for things to be like this or to be like that. Things are also not-self because we can neither stop nor control them. If we see that everything is impermanent, stressful, and not-self, we will not be deluded. Without delusion, we will no longer have greed or desire. Without desire, anger will also cease. Anger arises when we do not get what we desire. For instance, we become angry if we are prevented from doing what we want to do. But if we do not have desire or want anything at all, we will not get angry. Whatever other people do, we don't care, because we are equanimous. However, if we want something, we will become agitated right away if we can't have it. Greed and anger arise from delusion, not knowing that everything we would like to have is impermanent, stressful, and not-self. If we have wisdom

to teach ourselves that everything is impermanent, stressful, and not-self, then we will not want anything.

This is the method to uproot or kill the defilements permanently. We should kill them with wisdom; kill them using the truth because defilements arise out of delusion, out of wrong view and not seeing in line with the truth. We usually see impermanence as permanence, suffering as happiness, not-self as self. For instance, this body is not ours, but we see it as us and belonging to us. So we have to correct this using wisdom.

In order to have wisdom we need to first have *samādhi*. The mind should first be calm and tranquil, because without inner happiness the mind will not have the strength to see in line with the truth. Defilements will hover around and tell us that the body is us and belongs to us all the time. We have to suppress the defilements temporarily for them to settle down. Once calmed down, there will not be any defilements to tell us that the body is us or ours. Once we contemplate our body and the

things of the physical world according to reason and truth, we will realise that they are not really us or ours.

This is the Dhamma that the Buddha taught us to practice, which is the Eight-Fold Noble Path. We do not need anything else such as the various rituals that worship the Buddha. The Buddha taught us to pay homage through meditation, using our time to develop the path. The path is the medicine that can cure the diseases of the mind. Our mind currently suffers from diseases such as discontentment and distress. To cure these, we need the medicine that kills the disease-causing microbes, or in the case of the mind we need to address the causes of suffering, which are all of our various desires. Mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, i.e. the path, is the Dhamma medicine that we can use to remove all desires from the mind. Without desire, our minds will be free from any sense of suffering or dissatisfaction.

This freedom is the purpose of spreading the Buddha's teachings, which allow us to establish the Dhamma

within our hearts. Dhamma is the path of virtue, concentration, and wisdom; of generosity, virtue, and meditation; of developing goodness, refraining from evil, and purifying the heart. This is the path. However we phrase it, it is all the same. Having developed the path, we can wipe out all levels of greed and anger until our mind is clean and pure. Without desire, our mind will be released from suffering and will not be affected by anything.

Therefore, our duty is to practice. If we want to pay respect to the Buddha, he taught us to show respect through our practice. Offering incense and flowers brings little benefit and little happiness. When we bow down to the Buddha, our heart is cool and comfortable, but then later when we encounter various issues and people outside the temple, our hearts immediately become agitated. However, if we pay homage to the Buddha by practising his Dhamma so that we gain mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, then wherever we go and whatever do, our mind will be composed all the time.

May we all set our minds on paying homage to the Buddha through our practice. Coming here today is one way of doing this. At first we listen to a Dhamma talk, and then we take what we've learned and put it into practice. We practice generosity, maintain our virtue, and develop mindfulness. We control our thoughts, not allowing them to drift off. Try repeating *Buddho, Buddho* continuously. Do not think about other things. Then we will find that a change takes place in the mind. The mind will be emptier, cooler, and more peaceful. It will become increasingly comfortable and light, because it is not burdened by anything.

When we think about various issues it is like we are hunched over, carrying them on our backs, but once we stop thinking, it is like we put these burdens down. We can lay them down by reciting *Buddho, Buddho*, and after that we can let them go by using wisdom to see that they are all impermanent, stressful, and not-self. We will then let go and not be burden by anything. We will be intelligent and deluded no longer. Why should we

keep on carrying these things? What benefit is there in being burdened? Wouldn't it be better not to be burdened by anything? So just let things be. There is no need to get involved. Whatever happens, let it go. Actually, we like to be burdened. Whatever happens, we like get involved, wanting things to go this or that way, and then we complain about how awful the situation is. But actually it was us who chose to become stressed, who got involved with it. We are unable to let go because we do not use *Buddho* to stop our thinking and desire.

So let's develop mindfulness a lot, mentally repeat *Buddho* a lot, so our mind will experience greater lightness and comfort. We will soon begin to understand why we need to recite *Buddho*, why mindfulness is so important. Only by meditating will we be able to understand. If we do not meditate, no change will take place in the mind. For there to be any changes, they must arise from our meditation, by controlling our thoughts, gradually reducing them until they eventually come to a full stop. After that we can teach our mind to

think in the right way, to let things go, to see the truth of impermanence, stress, and not-self. But in the beginning we cannot direct it in this way, so we have to stop our thoughts first. If we let our thoughts wander, we will not see things as impermanent, stressful, and not-self. So first we should stop our thoughts by reciting *Buddho, Buddho*.

It is as if we have been driving our car in the wrong direction. We have to stop first before we can make a U-turn and drive in the right direction. Similarly, our minds have been thinking in the wrong way, based on false beliefs, thinking things are permanent, pleasurable, and self. We have to first stop this type of thinking. Having done so, we can then direct our minds to consider how things are really impermanent, stressful, and not-self. As we continue contemplating *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, we let go of our attachments step by step, reducing our desire bit by bit until in the end, no desire is left in the mind. Without greed or desire, no suffering of any type will arise in the mind. In this way our mind is able to free itself from suffering.

First we develop mindfulness to stop our thoughts, which leads to *samādhī* (concentration). Having the ability to concentrate, we proceed to think in the right way, which is called wisdom. This is mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. This is similar to realising that we are driving south when we want to go north: we must apply the brakes, stop the car, and make a U-turn.

May you contemplate this and put it into practice, because it is only by practicing it that you will really experience the benefits. Listening is good, but if it is not followed by practice, then the results will not arise. However, if we practice without first listening to the teachings, we can lose our way. If we are not sure of the way, but proceed anyway, we might go astray. Before we set out on the path, we should be confident we know the way. If we are not sure, we should ask those who know how we should proceed. The Buddha taught us to first study and listen to the Dhamma. Once we know how to practise, then we proceed. We need both study and practice in order for us to be successful and attain

the path, fruition, and enlightenment. If we practice without studying, we are walking without knowing which direction to go and which destination to head for, so we won't reach our goal.

Therefore, meditation requires the guidance of a teacher or an Ajaan. This does not mean that you need a teacher beside you in meditation. We ask our teacher how to practise meditation and then proceed to practise by ourselves. Then we return back to relate our experiences to our teacher to see if we are headed in the right direction. It is like doing homework and turning it in to the teacher who corrects it. If it's right, the teacher will tell us it is right. If it is wrong, the teacher will tell us how we can improve. This is how we study and practice correctly.

There should be a teacher or an Ajaan. Otherwise, we may lose our way or go crazy, which happens sometimes when people practice without a teacher. When they see 'something' in their meditation, when they have visions, they think they are special. In truth,

what we see has no meaning at all, but we mistakenly believe it to be significant. We have to be careful about this when we meditate. Before we practice, we have to reflect on why we do so. What is the purpose of sitting in meditation? It is for the sake of a mind that is calm, stable, equanimous, and empty. We do not meditate to see hell and heaven, to see *devas* and angels. We do not practice to gain psychic abilities. This is something we should understand.

As we sit in meditation, it is possible for all sorts of things to occur, so we must be careful not to get lost in them. Just know what arises and then let it go. Our only aim is a calm mind. If we have not yet achieved calm, we should keep reciting *Buddho* without fail. It is the same as travelling from here to our home in Bangkok: along the way we might pass many attractions, but we can decide not to stop or take any detours and keep on driving until we reach Bangkok. Or on the other hand, if we stop at these attractions, we might never reach our destination. We might be so deluded by the various attractions that we think they are our home. But actually

our home is a calm and still mind, one that is empty and happy. But visiting the various attractions does not bring emptiness or calm. We should be careful. Do not pay any attention to these things, and just continue to meditate, continue reciting *Buddho* until reaching emptiness and calm. Then the meditation will stop by itself. That's enough for now. Anyone who wishes to ask a question may do so.

Question: If a foreign monk wants to stay for the Rains Retreat, may he do so?

Tan Ajaan: We will have to see first. I couldn't say one way or the other right away. Let him come and try staying here first. It is similar to marriage: How can you agree to marriage without even meeting your spouse? If two people do not love each other, they really should not get married.

Question: I mention this because if it works out, I will bring a foreign monk to see Tan Ajaan.

Tan Ajaan: Right now, we have a Singaporean and a German monk.

Question: Tan Ajaan can speak English well and will be able to teach him Dhamma. Last month, he said that he would visit Luangpor Chanrian. He will be returning to Ajaan Chern Chai's temple in May to stay for the Rains Retreat, but if there is an opportunity, I would like to bring him to pay respect to Tan Ajaan.

Tan Ajaan: Bring him along and let him talk to the Singaporean monk so he can find out how things are done here. Mostly, we study on our own. There are a number of books by Luangta Maha Boowa that have been translated into English, which he can read first. Then if he has any questions, he can come ask.

Actually in the practice, we do not have to study a lot. It mostly depends on our own meditation. But if he practises and gets stuck on *samādhi* or has a problem, he can come to ask for help. Teaching is not that difficult. In the early days foreigners stayed with

Luangpor Chah who didn't speak English, but they were still able to learn from him just by watching him and following his example. So meditation practice is not just about sitting and listening, but it is about knowing what should be done and then doing it.

Actually, just knowing one word is enough – 'sati' or 'mindfulness'. Just knowing that one should recite *Buddho* all day long and being able to do so is enough. We don't need to know a whole lot. Tell him that if he wants to come, he may. But whether he can stay for a long time or not, we will need to see. There are many factors that need to be considered. If he wants to, he may stay for a while to try it out.

(Distributing Dhamma books) Please do read the book, otherwise it will be like useless scrap paper. If you read it, though, it will be like gold, and you will gain great wealth.

Question: If the repetition of *Buddho* has not yet yielded good results, do we just continue with it, or should we change techniques?

Tan Ajaan: Any technique is acceptable as long as you can control your thinking. You don't want to think too much. (Asking a layperson) Do you still practice?

Layperson: Yes.

Tan Ajaan: Having studied, what should you do next? Practise by yourself, right?

Question: Yes, practise at home by myself.

Tan Ajaan: Don't think that we have graduated and can now stop practising. We have only learned the theoretical aspects but have not yet mastered the core of the practice. We should use the knowledge we have gained to practise until we achieve the path and fruition of *nibbāna*. If we practise, we will definitely get there. Just like if we eat, we will definitely get full. But if we do

not eat, we will not become full. Therefore, we should be diligent, exert ourselves, have patience, endurance, and discipline, and force ourselves to practise when it is time to do so. Don't practice according to your emotions. If we just follow our feelings, then whenever we are not in the mood we will not practise. Since most of the time our emotions discourage us from meditating, we have to force ourselves. When we wake up in the morning we should sit in concentration, pay respect to the Buddha, chant, and listen to Dhamma talks. Before sleeping we should again pay respect to the Buddha, chant, and listen to Dhamma talks. At the least, we should listen to Dhamma talks during the day when we are free. We have to have a fixed routine in the same way we eat our meals on a regular basis. If we have time to eat, surely we also have time to meditate. Meditation is like feeding the mind. If we give food to the body at regular times, why can't we do the same for the mind?

Try to do it often, for the mind is hundreds of times more important than the body. The body is a temporary thing, and after not too long it will die. The mind never dies,

but it is hungry all the time because we do not feed it, because we do not practice Dhamma. If we practise then in future we will be full all the time. The important thing is the mind; it is our foundation, because it does not die along with the body. If we meditate, then when we no longer have a body we will not be restless, but will live with contentment and happiness, having Dhamma to feed the mind. Without Dhamma to nourish the mind, we will be starving, agitated, and distressed when our body ceases to function.

Let us try to practise as much as possible. Let's feed the mind more than the body. No matter how much we nourish the body, it will still eventually die, but the mind never dies. Without food, the mind will only experience hunger. Once it gets the food of Dhamma, though, it will be happy and satisfied. There is no one who can do this for us; we are the ones who have to do the work ourselves. Just like no one can eat on our behalf, no one can meditate on our behalf either. We ought to take this maxim to heart: oneself is one's own refuge. So let's try to meditate.

Question: [Asking about another person's health condition]

Tan Ajaan: He is doing better and went to see the doctor. He is not able to meditate, and so he tries to use medicine as a replacement.

Question: Is his illness the result of past karma?

Tan Ajaan: There is no foundation for that. We become easily alarmed by what other people say, even though there is no foundation for it, like the rabbit who believed the sky was falling down after only hearing a tree fall. We lack self-control and a strong foundation of heart. Just like when someone suggests something bad will happen, like a fortune teller who predicts our impending death, we become panicky and incapacitated by fear, worrying that if we do anything, we will die just like he said. This is the characteristic of people who lack mindfulness to control their thoughts, which is why mindfulness is so important. If we have enough

mindfulness, then when we are agitated we just have to single-mindedly repeat *Buddho* and the agitation will disappear. The more we think, the more agitated and stressed we become, because the mind thinks in ways that lead to suffering, not knowing how its thoughts are a burden or how to put them down. Therefore, we should develop mindfulness a lot.

Question: It saddens a lot of people to see someone who has made so much merit suffer in this way. With all that has happened, we worry about him.

Tan Ajaan: Just practising generosity is not enough. We need to make merit by developing mindfulness in order to be able to look after the mind. His situation shows that we have to be careful. Be confident in the teachings of the Buddha. If we are certain, we will not waver. The Buddha taught us that after birth comes death. This is normal, so why fear death so much? At most, we only die. Whatever will be, will be. If we go bankrupt, we just go bankrupt. So what? We just accept whatever happens, and let things be. Worst comes to worst, we

only die. If we accept death, then all kinds of problems become insignificant. But if we fear death, then whatever happens becomes a big problem. We should continuously reflect on death. The Buddha told us to think that once we take birth, aging is normal and unavoidable. Illness is normal and unavoidable. Death too is normal and unavoidable. We should teach ourselves in this manner every day so we will not forget, and so we will be able to accept whatever happens.

Therefore we should think that these are things that just have to happen. Whether we make merit or not, we all have to take birth, get sick, and die. Whether we practise meditation or not, we all have to take birth, get sick, and die. The difference is whether we suffer as we go through birth, sickness, and death. If we practise meditation, if we have mindfulness and wisdom, and accept the truth, then these events will be seen as normal and ordinary. Just like the rain and sun, there is nothing extraordinary about them. The mind does not age, get sick, and die along with the body. The one who gets panicked and agitated is not the body. It is not the

body who is restless, because it does not fear aging, sickness, or death. The body is not aware that it has to age, get sick, and die. But the one who does not age, get sick, or die gets upset on behalf of the body. So we must teach the mind that it is not necessary to get upset, because we do not age, get sick, or die along with the body. We are the mind, the one who knows, that which knows equanimously. That's it.

But our mind has defilements and ignorance that fools us into thinking that we are the body. Whenever anything happens to our body, we panic and become agitated. Instead, we have to separate the body from the mind. The mind has to be able to separate itself from the body. If it can, then there will be no more mental suffering.

Question: After sitting in meditation for not too long as I was reciting *Buddho, Buddho* just disappeared. When it was gone it felt like I was sleeping, but I am not too sure.

Tan Ajaan: Mindfulness was weak and lacking. We should develop mindfulness. We should go meditate somewhere that will arouse fear, so we will not get sleepy. If we meditate in a safe place, we may get sleepy. Or we can also fast or eat less food so we are a little hungry and won't be drowsy. Follow the eight precepts and don't eat in the evening.

Question: Currently on the observance days I follow the eight precepts.

Tan Ajaan: Give it a try. But the most important thing really is mindfulness. It is something we have to practise a lot. During work or whenever we do anything, stay mindful and continue repeating *Buddho, Buddho*.

Question: In this way will we be able to develop insight meditation?

Tan Ajaan: If we do not currently have concentration, it will be hard to do so. We should first have mindfulness and concentration. But if we want to contemplate a bit,

we can. Think about impermanence, suffering, and not-self. Consider how the body will age, get sick, and die. The body is not me and does not belong to me. It is just the composition of earth, water, wind, and fire. It is not pretty or beautiful, especially after it dies. When you see dead people, however beautiful or handsome they were, once they die they are no longer beautiful or handsome. Think in this way to eliminate our various desires, to reduce our craving. If we can think in this way without being distracted, go ahead. But if we cannot, then we should first use *Buddho, Buddho*. Train the mind to be still and calm, so that we can contemplate undisturbed for a long time.

Question: Sometimes when I sit in meditation it is like I fall asleep.

Tan Ajaan: If you're falling asleep, then you should get up and walk instead. We can develop mindfulness while walking and reciting *Buddho, Buddho*. Walk until the drowsiness goes away and the mind is bright. Then we can sit again.

The True Nature of the Body

March 1, 2013

It is the tradition of Chinese people to visit the cemetery this time of the year to pay respect to their ancestors. In the time of the Buddha it was also customary to visit the cemetery, especially for monks. However, the intention and emotional state of the lay people and monks who visit the cemetery are different because monks go to see the true nature of the body. At the Buddha's time when a person died the corpse was kept unburied in the cemetery. After three days, five days, or seven days, the monks would see the different conditions of the dead body as it swelled, cracked, and attracted insects. Dogs or other animals would come to devour the body, scattering the arms and legs around in different directions.

We view a scene like this in order to teach and remind ourselves about the truth of the body, to see and know that this body is only a temporary composition of 32 parts that include the hair, nails, teeth, tendons, bones,

and skin, which are all made out of earth, water, wind, and fire. When the body dies and stops functioning, it reverts back to its original elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. There is no animal, person, or self in the body or in the 32 parts of the body. Our mind will come to know the truth about our own body, which is just a temporary composition of the various elements and body parts. We will then not be attached and deluded, thinking that the body is us or that it belongs to us. If we are not deluded that it is us or ours, we will not cling to it or be attached to it. We will also not crave for things that do not belong to us. Whatever happens to things that are not ours will not distress or agitate us.

For instance, whatever happens to the bodies of other people who we don't really know, be it their aging, sickness, or death, does not trouble us. But if these things happen to those who we have ties with or who we are attached to, such as our parents, siblings, kids, husbands or wives, our mind will be distressed, even though our worries do not in any way change the reality of the situation. What is real and true just remains as it

is: we all have to experience aging, sickness, and death. Absolutely no one can prevent or avoid it because this is the nature of the body, the nature of earth, water, wind, and fire.

Our bodies come from the food we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe. These elements are combined to form the 32 parts of the body, such as our hair that is always growing. If we continue to eat food, drink water, and breathe air, the body will continue to produce longer and longer hair. But if we don't continue to eat, drink water, and breathe air, the hair will not be able to grow at all, and will only deteriorate and drop out of the body. Because whenever the body does not have the support of the four elements, it begins to break down. All it takes is for the body to stop breathing for it to deteriorate very rapidly. Within a few days, the body will look like something we have never seen before. This is what we'd see on a visit to the cemetery during the time of the Buddha.

The Buddha taught monks to visit the cemetery in order to overcome their attachment to the body, to cut off their desire to avoid aging, sickness, and death, and to correct sexual desire that views the body as beautiful. Upon seeing the condition of a corpse, sexual desire will not arise.

During the time of the Buddha there was a monk who struggled with sexual desire. It so happened that a prostitute, famed for her stunning beauty, died, and so the Buddha sent this monk to contemplate her dead body. While contemplating her corpse, the mind of this monk was able to gain enlightenment, wiping out his sexual desire. From that point on whenever he saw a beautiful female figure or face, he would recall the sight of the prostitute's dead body. In this way he was able to eliminate his sexual desire.

Sexual desire comes from seeing physical bodies as beautiful. If we want to extinguish sexual desire, we have to continuously develop the practice of seeing the loathsomeness and ugly aspects of the body and face

so that it leaves a deep impression on the mind. Whenever sexual desire arises, merely recollecting the loathsome aspects will quickly extinguish it. People practice this way because they see the drawbacks of sexual desire. But those who do not see the harm of sexual desire will not want to look at unattractive images. This depends on the level of mindfulness and wisdom of each individual. Some people will see that the drawbacks of sexual desire outweigh the benefits and will urgently seek out methods to overcome sexual desire and eliminate it completely. For without sexual desire, we will be able to stay alone in seclusion, without needing a partner, free from the burden of taking care of a partner, with no need for bonding. With a partner, there is bound to be love and attachment, wanting them to be good and beautiful and stay loyal to us for a long time. But if things don't go according to our wishes, sadness and unhappiness arises.

There is a story from the time of Luangpu Mun. A disciple of Luangpu Mun had a wife before he ordained. He became very distraught when he found his wife

cheating on him and wanted to kill her and the man she was with. Fortunately, he regained mindfulness and reasoned to himself that killing them would be a worse act than the affair itself. He reflected on the impermanence of life, and how we have nothing that is really for certain. People's minds are always changing back and forth. Today our wife may love us, but tomorrow she may not. Today she may stay with us, but tomorrow she may not. He was thus able to let go and accept the truth that having a spouse is tremendously stressful. Even while living together and very much in love, we still have many problems and worries. We are afraid of what may happen to the people we love. If there is no love, then there will be no quarrels and bickering. If either partner is unfaithful, it will only lead to sorrow and disheartenment.

He thus decided to release his wife to her lover, ordain as a monk, and to live without a spouse. He announced his decision to the people in the village, saying that he had broken up with his wife and relinquished her to the other man. He then left to ordain and eventually went on

to study and practise under Phra Ajaan Mun. He was eventually able to gain enlightenment, becoming an Arahant. If you're curious, this man was Luangpu Khao whose autobiography was written by Luangta Maha Boowa.

These are the drawback of sexual desire. Those who still have sexual desire will have to find a spouse. Having found one, we will have to shoulder the burden of maintaining our spouse since we want them to stay with us for a long time and to always provide us with pleasure. However, if our spouse dies or changes, then our joy turns into suffering. Our heavenly existence becomes a hellish one. If we are not mentally strong enough, lacking in Dhamma, mindfulness, and wisdom, we may end up acting in unskillful ways that lead us to suffer in hell, because of the anger and sorrow that overcame our mind.

Weighing the pros and cons of having a body, the benefits are meagre compared to the drawbacks. The body is just a means for us to seek pleasure through the

eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. Currently we are happy because we can physically obtain pleasure through sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile objects, but the pleasure is so transient. When in contact with these objects we can gain some happiness, but once they are gone, the pleasure completely fades away. This process creates the need to search externally more and more, to continuously seek new sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, to repeatedly organize various types of entertainment. This is a happiness that is not real or permanent, because when we do not get the experiences we desire, we feel lonesome and sorrowful. Furthermore, when the body starts to degenerate, distress arises within our hearts because we are no longer able to use the body to obtain our happiness.

These are the drawbacks of relying on the body as a means to seek happiness. People whose mind still desire a physical body as a tool to find happiness and who lack the mindfulness and wisdom to see the harm of using the body in this way will have to come back to

be reborn many, many times until meeting a Buddha. One who has seen the harm of constant rebirth and of having a body, who has seen the path of relinquishing the body, who has found something much more valuable than the body, that one is our own heart and mind. Seeing that there is a greater happiness available than what the body can offer gives us peace of mind.

If we meet the Buddha or his enlightened disciples, we will be able to receive their teachings that instruct us to discard our sensual craving that habitually uses the body as a means to seek happiness. They teach in this way because the body is not lasting or reliable. When the body is healthy, we can use it according to our wishes. But when it deteriorates or is not able to function, our mind will be very distressed. We may not even want to live anymore. People with physical disabilities who are paralyzed and cannot use their body at all, who cannot take trips to various places, might often be easily agitated, annoyed, or in a bad mood. Sometimes, they may even think of killing themselves.

This is the harm that comes from clinging to the body out of sensual craving. If we do not have sensual or sexual desire, then it's not necessary to use the body. If we do not want to see, hear, smell, taste, or touch various things, then having a body is not necessary. So having met Buddhism, we learn something that will enable us to relinquish our clinging and attachment to the body and the corresponding sexual desire.

Buddhism teaches us that there is a much greater happiness than the pleasure obtained from the body. This exalted happiness is simply a peaceful and calm mind. '*Natthi santi paramari sukham.*' There is no happiness in the world comparable to the happiness that comes from a peaceful mind. It is this that we do not understand. If we had not met Buddhism, we would never know the way that allows us to experience this happiness and maintain it forever.

Our mind never dies and the happiness within our mind does not deteriorate along with the body. This body by its very nature has to deteriorate, but when our

happiness does not rely on the body as its tool, our happiness that comes from peace of mind will not deteriorate along with the body. When our body reaches the end of its lifespan, our mind can still be happy. As an example, Luangpu Chob, even though he was paralysed and had to sit in a wheel chair, was still smiling and brimming with happiness. His mind certainly did not lack happiness. He did not need to use the body as a means to seek satisfaction. Instead he used Dhamma to provide his mind with peace and joy.

The Dhamma that allows our mind to be calm and peaceful is mindfulness. But before we can arouse mindfulness, we first need virtue (*sīla*). And before are able to have virtue, we first must be generous in giving donations (*dāna*). Being unable to be charitable shows that people still have greed, that they desire to accumulate wealth, are still possessive of their assets and property, and thus they are ones who will not be able to maintain their virtue. They desire possessions and want to obtain them quickly and easily, even if requires immoral actions.

For instance, salespeople always complain that it is too difficult to maintain their virtue because they cannot always speak the truth and must tell lies. They fear that by speaking the truth they may not be able to sell their goods. They are seeing things wrongly. People who always make merit and give donations do not feel any tension between maintaining the precepts and making a living because they are not so concerned about how much money they make. They uphold a proper standard of behaviour by taking virtue as the basis of their action. If they have anything to say, they say it in line with the truth. If they cannot speak the truth, then it is better not to say anything at all. That's what they do. Whether the customers buy the goods or not is their decision. There is no need to get upset. The profit may not be quite as good, but their income is still enough to support the basic necessities of life. A modest livelihood is good enough; it is not necessary to have excessive wealth or flaunt our status.

Make merit by giving things away. This causes our mind to be content and happy, making it loving, kind and compassionate, making it unnecessary to accumulate demerit or do evil actions, and enabling it to have the time to develop mindfulness and to practise meditation so as to build up *samādhī*. It is not necessary to work around the clock; just work enough to lead a modest life supported by the four basic requisites of clothes, food, shelter, and medicine. Isn't it more worthwhile to use our time seeking a happiness that no money or wealth can buy? Even a multi-billionaire cannot have the happiness that comes from making the mind peaceful. They don't have the time to develop mindfulness because doing so requires them to be away from all their worldly activities and responsibilities.

If we still take on worldly responsibilities, such as working for our livelihood, the mind will have to think about matters related to work and will have to solve those problems all the time, so there isn't any time to stop the proliferation of thought. If we cannot stop the proliferation of thought, we will not be able to calm our

mind. Without a calm mind, we will not be able to obtain a much greater happiness. Without peace and happiness within, we will have to depend on the happiness that comes from things money can buy. However, such happiness is harmful because it is only temporary, and must be constantly maintained and 'topped-up'. No matter how much you fill your life with pleasures, it can never be full enough. When the time comes when we are not able to fill it up, we will end up sad, lonely, neglected, and generally unhappy.

These are matters that we should be concerned about because they are the way that the Buddha taught to us to build our own true happiness, a happiness that is much better than the everyday type, a happiness that lies within our mind. But we have to find the time to build it up. Whenever possible we should stay away from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, and all activities and responsibilities, so as to be able to control our thinking and allow our mind to be calm and stable. For instance, we can use '*Buddho*'. If we keep up the *parikamma*, '*Buddho*,' continuously, we will not be

able to think about anything else, because the mind can only think of one thing at a time. If our thinking stays with '*Buddho*', then our mind will not be able to think about other things, about this or that person. Thus our various emotions calm down, and all of our various thoughts will gradually decrease until finally the mind becomes calm.

This is how to build up the happiness that replaces the type of happiness that comes from using the body. Having obtained happiness that does not need to use the body, we will be able to let go of the body. We will not have any issue with old age, sickness, or death, because we do not need to use the body. This is like if we don't need to use a car, then we don't need to be concerned about maintaining it or buying a new car if it breaks down. We don't even need to leave the house to seek happiness since we have a better and greater happiness right inside our own home. Why would we want to seek an outer happiness that is inferior? So there is no need for us to use a car to go various places, so having a car loses its significance.

Our body is just like the car that we use as a means to seek pleasure and happiness through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. But when we have a happiness that is better, that does not need to use the body as an instrument, we will not be anxious when the body deteriorates. Whenever the body falls sick or dies, we will not be troubled at all, because we no longer use the body as our source of happiness. This refers to the mind of those people who have released themselves from sexual desire, who have come out of the delusion that makes them cling to the body; who have ceased to believe that the body is themselves or belongs to them, or that it provides them with happiness. Right now we have met the truth that teaches us real happiness does not require a body, does not require a partner, does not require a husband, and does not requires a wife.

Those who ordain and stay alone in the forest are able to be happy. Just like the Buddha — after he left the palace he never returned to his old life with his wife. He found a joy and happiness that was even greater, that

did not have any drawbacks. This is the message that Buddhism gives us. It helps free us from *Mara's* grasp, which is the delusion that fools us into seeking happiness via the body. It is the Buddha who saw the path, the truth, and the means that can enable us not to use the body as a source of happiness.

Therefore, we should visit the cemetery and investigate the body to determine the underlying cause of our suffering. For if we do not investigate, we will still be deluded and attached to the body, seeing the body as ourselves and belonging to us, seeing the body as beautiful, and wanting to use it to give us happiness. If we investigate, visit the cemetery often, and see the actual conditions of the body — that in reality it is truly not beautiful, with 32 parts that have to deteriorate, rot and disappear — we will then have a means to correct our delusion. Then every time we see a beautiful body, we can think of the corpses we have seen in the cemetery.

This is how we make our escape from the shackles of carnal passion and overwhelming delusion that clings to the body as ourselves and belonging to us. We will not have to suffer with the body any longer. There will be no need to return to birth, to seek a new body, or to become old, sick, and die, like we currently experience. If we are still unable to see the truth of the body as not beautiful, as simply earth, water, wind, and fire, if we are still unable to extinguish sexual desire, then no matter how many times we die we will still return seeking a new body because we still hunger for sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile sensations. We will need eyes, ears, a nose, tongue and body as the means to fulfil our desire.

However, if instead of being hungry we become disenchanted, we will see the ugly aspects of the body, that its actual condition is composed of earth, water, wind, and fire, and that it will one day age, get sick, and die. This is because the body is only the composition of earth, water, wind, and fire, is not ourselves, and does not belong to us. If we have the wisdom to investigate in

this manner consistently, we will be able to maintain and prolong the peace that arises from sitting in meditation because the mind will not have the desire that causes agitation to arise.

This is the responsibility of wisdom after we come out of *samādhi*. If we wish to maintain peace of mind, we should use wisdom. If we do not use wisdom, then when we see a body, emotion will arise; agitation will arise; restlessness and worry will arise; and lust will arise. But if there is wisdom to neutralise our emotional reaction, when we see a beautiful image we focus on the ugly aspects and the sexual urge loses its power, allowing the mind to calm down.

Similarly, when there is restlessness and worry about old age, sickness, and death, if we see that this body in reality has to experience these sooner or later, we will be able to accept the truth, go along with it, and let the body go its separate way. This is because we know that the body is merely the composition of earth, water, wind, and fire. We are the ones that occupy and live in it

temporarily. We are not the body and therefore need not feel concerned about our physical aging, sickness, and death. This wisdom will enable us to maintain our peace indefinitely. If we do not reach the level of wisdom but merely rest in *samādhi*, then when we leave *samādhi*, our peace will quickly fade.

This is like water that we cool in the refrigerator: when first removed it is cool, but once you leave it out for a while it loses its coolness. To cool it down again, we have to place it back into the refrigerator. In the same way, those who have only developed *samādhi* but are still unable to develop wisdom must return to *samādhi* once their mental calm has faded away. Meditating in this way is called being stuck on the level of *samādhi* and not being able to progress beyond that.

If we wish to progress, we should know how to develop wisdom, know how to investigate the body to see it as *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. We should know that the body transitions through birth, old age, sickness, and death, that the body is *anattā*, composed of earth, water,

wind, and fire, consists of 32 parts, and that the body is not pretty or lovely. Investigate in this way, and in the future the mind will not need to enter *samādhī*. If we can let go of the body, the mind will be calm and peaceful at all times. It will no longer be necessary to enter *samādhī* because there isn't anything that will come to agitate or force the mind out of its peaceful state.

This is the level of wisdom. In most cases, if we meditators do not have a teacher to guide us, we will be stuck at the level of *samādhī*. For when our mind is calm, it is blissful and happy. Once we come out of concentration we go about with our errands, and when we become agitated again we return to sit in *samādhī*, never thinking about developing wisdom and never knowing how or when to do so. Some people think that once their mind is calm they should immediately develop wisdom, but that is also wrong. When the mind is calm, there is no need to do anything because that is the time for the mind to rest.

It is like when we sleep: we do not make the body do anything, we just let it sleep and rest fully. Upon awakening, we can go back to work. In the same way, when the mind is resting in peace, it is not yet time to develop wisdom. It is the time for the mind to rest, stock up on happiness, and to fully regain its strength. Once it naturally comes out of that state, it will then be the proper time to investigate with wisdom.

If we do not investigate, after not too long the calm will fade away, and we will not be able to investigate because the *kilesas* (defilements) will start to come out and create trouble. We will be unwilling to see and accept the truth. There won't be anyone who wants to look at unattractive images. No one will be interested in contemplating birth, sickness, or death. This is because the *kilesas* arise and drag us to think about other things that are beautiful and lovely. We focus on growth and stability without looking at death and decline.

Thus, we overlook the truth, thinking that our body will go on forever and forgetting that it will deteriorate,

thinking that the body will remain beautiful forever and not considering the ugly aspects. Thus, we end up being attached to the body, to sexual desire, and to the delusion that the body is us or that it belongs to us. Therefore, if we wish to progress to the highest level, we should investigate the body once we come out of *samādhī*.

However, if we are still think about other things such as wealth, status, praise, assets, possessions, and money, we will have to first investigate those things. They too are impermanent, subject to growth as well as decline. Having wealth, we may lose it. Gaining status, we may lose it. Being praised, we may also be criticised. With happiness, there is also suffering. Investigate so that we can let go and not be attached to wealth, status, praise, or the pleasure we get through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. Once we can let go of all these, we can then proceed to investigate the body. Investigate its unattractiveness to extinguish sexual desire. Investigate the impermanence of our existence with its birth, aging, sickness, and death. Investigate this physical form that

has no self, that consists of 32 parts, and that is composed of earth, water, wind, and fire.

This is contemplating the body, so as to give up our belief in a lasting self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) and our desire for sex. This leads to the various levels of noble attainments, the lowest being *Sotāpanna* (Stream-enterer), followed by *Sakadāgāmī* (Once-returner) and *Anāgāmī* (Non-returner). We must first pass through the investigation of the body in order to let go of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* and sexual desire. When we have let go of these, we attain to the level of *Anāgāmī*.

After this what's left are the subtle defilements that dwell not in the body but in the mind. They are *māna* or ego (a sense of self) and *avijjā*, which is not seeing things in terms of the subtle Four Noble Truths that lie buried inside the mind. It is then the duty of the *Anāgāmī* to develop wisdom to see that there is no *māna* and no self. 'Self' is merely a delusion of the mind. For in reality, there is no real self at all. The mind is not a self; it is just 'that which knows'. Let the mind just know and don't

allow it to think of itself as myself, as me, or as mine. But we still have thoughts that involve our sense of self, so we have to use wisdom to see that it is only thinking. Really, there is no self; there is only 'that which knows'. The duty of 'that which knows' is to know equanimously, to simply know.

Contentment

April 6, 2013

Today we have come to do what the Buddha taught us to do, which is to practise generosity, virtue, and meditation, because these activities are like a ladder that leads us up to a higher goodness and happiness that the Buddha and his enlightened disciples have attained. If we do these things a lot, we will get there quickly. If we do just a little, we'll get there slowly. No one but ourselves can determine whether we progress slowly or quickly. We are the ones who walk the path, who climb the ladder.

The ladder here is called *magga* in Pali, which is translated as the path that leads the mind step by step up to higher stages, starting from the human level and progressing to that of heavenly beings. We leave the heavens for the *brahma* world, and after that we reach the various stages of noble attainments, those of Stream-entry (*Sotāpanna*), Once-returner (*Sakadāgāmi*), Non-returner (*Anāgāmi*), and *Arahantship*. These are the

various rungs of the ladder along the way of practicing generosity, moral virtue, and meditation. If we practise generosity and maintain our virtue, we will reach the various levels of heaven. Which level we reach is dependent on how generous we are and how pure our virtue is. This is like students in school who receive their test results. Some get 'A's, some get 'B's, and some get 'C's. Our grade depends on our ability to be generous and maintain our virtue, which in the case of those heading for heaven means giving away anything extra that we have and keeping the five precepts.

Hoarding our wealth and possessions only adds to our responsibilities, causing agitation and worry. If we give them up, donate them, and distribute them to those who have less than us and who are in need, then our heart will feel light. Happiness and contentment will arise in our heart. Virtue means upholding the five training rules. Our ability to maintain all of the five training rules every moment of every day, from the time we wake up until we go to sleep, determines the level of our mind. If we can maintain it continuously from the moment we wake up

until we go to sleep again, then we will be able to reach a high state of mind. However, if we can only maintain it sporadically, then we will not reach a very high level. These are the meritorious results arising from charitable actions and maintaining virtue.

Furthermore, if we practise meditation and are able to keep our mind calm, we will move from the heavens to the brahma realms, which also have many levels that correspond to the different levels of concentration (*samādhī*). There are a total of nine levels: Four form *jhānas*, four formless *jhānas*, and one state of cessation (*nirodha samāpatti*). These are states of calm that arises when we sit in concentration and restrict the mind to only one mental subject, not allowing the mind to be distracted and think about other matters. If we can force the mind to stay with a single mental object, then the mind can calm down and enter the various stages of concentration. Which stage we reach depends on the strength of mindfulness that restrains the mind and prevents it from thinking absent-mindedly about various things.

Concentration has nine levels in total. The first four are levels of form *jhāna*, the next four are formless *jhāna*, and the highest is known as *cessation*. These levels of mental calm correspond with the strength of our mindfulness. If mindfulness is strong, then the calmness that we get will be deep and long-lasting. If mindfulness is weak, then the calmness we get will correspondingly be shallow and fleeting. Therefore, if we want mental calmness that is deep and long-lasting, then we ought to strengthen mindfulness.

To give an analogy, mindfulness is like a rope which ties a ship to its dock. If it is necessary for the ship to be firmly tied down, then the rope has to be stronger than the ship. If the rope is weaker than the force of the ship drifting with the tide, then the rope can rip. Once the rope is broken, the ship can drift away. It is the same with our mind. If mindfulness is weak, our mind will drift away, carried by its imagination and thinking. But if the rope of mindfulness is stronger than the distracted mind that thinks of all sorts of things, the mind will be held firm

and still. Whether this stillness lasts long or not depends on how strong the rope of mindfulness is that ties down the mind, holding it against the current of mental proliferation. In some cases, the rope can restrain the mind only for a short moment before it breaks. Mindfulness is achieved only in part, so the calm that one we get is fleeting.

Concentration can be divided into two parts: access concentration (*kanika*) and one-pointedness (*appanā*). If the concentration we experience is brief, it is called *kanika samādhī*. If the concentration that we experience lasts longer, it is called *appanā samādhī*. We have to start with *kanika* in the beginning before moving to *appanā*. In the practise of meditation, we have to start with a little mindfulness before we can strengthen mindfulness step by step. The only exception is those who have already developed mindfulness fully in past lives; they can easily meditate with their mind fully integrated, entering *appanā samādhī* and remaining there for a long time. This is the result that comes from developing concentration (*samādhī*) in past lives.

This path of practise, whether it is being generous, maintaining virtue, sitting in meditation, or developing insight meditation is wholly the responsibility of the mind and not the body. When the body dies, the actions we have done will stick with the mind. When the mind obtains a new body, it can pick up where it left off without having to start all over again from the beginning. People who have enjoyed giving in the past will continue to enjoy giving after taking a new birth. People who value maintaining virtue will continue to maintain their virtue after being born again. People who meditate a lot will continue to sit in meditation. People who have contemplated impermanence, suffering, and not-self in this life will continue in the same manner in the next life, without needing anyone to teach them, because it is already part of their character. This is similar to how we use our dominant hand: If our right hand is dominant, then in our next life we will continue to use the right hand. If our left hand is dominant, we will continue to use the left hand.

These habitual tendencies are attached to the mind. The things we have always done become habits that form our character. If we enjoy drinking alcohol and have always done so in the past, then when we are born in this life we will again drink when given the chance. If we have gambled in the past, we will continue to gamble again when given the opportunity. If we are used to going out at night, we will continue to do so when the opportunity arises. If we have killed animals or people before, we will do so again when we can. If we are used to stealing, committing sexual misconduct, lying, or drinking alcohol, then when the opportunity presents itself we will do so again right away because these actions have become habits similar to our instinctive use of either our left or right hand. These habits become second nature and do not die along with the body, but stay with the mind, which is what we call merit or demerit. If the things that we do are harmful to others, it is called demerit. If the things that we do benefit others, it is called merit. Merit and demerit, skilful and unskilful habits, affect the minds of all sentient beings.

However, habitual tendencies are not permanent and can be changed. If we have been drinking alcohol, but learn from wise people or realize ourselves that drinking brings more harm than good, we can give it up. When we give it up we have to persevere, because trying to give up something that we have found enjoyable can be very difficult. It can cause us to feel very irritated and miserable. When people who drink alcohol cannot get any, they feel miserable. But if there is a place where there are people who can teach us to fight against the desire to drink, it may be possible to give it up. The place should be far away from where liquor is sold and where people drink, such as a temple. People who wish to stop drinking intoxicants should stay in a temple, especially in forest monasteries that are far away from the shops that sell intoxicants. There it is peaceful, without any sights or sounds to remind them of liquor and enchant the mind. In addition, the people staying there do not drink and only practise meditation to calm their minds. By staying in the company of people like that, giving up alcohol won't be so bad, because there are other things to replace the desire to drink, such as

sitting in group meditation. If we can successfully calm ourselves in meditation, then the desire to drink liquor will be eliminated. When the desire to drink is not encouraged it will quickly disappear altogether.

This is an example of the bad habitual tendencies that we call demerit. We can give up these habits if we still have them, but we will need to fight and persevere. Even if the bad habit is to become angry, we can still give it up as long as we know how to make the anger go away. Anger arises from not getting what we want, and from resisting the reality of a situation. When we desire something but someone interferes with our plans, anger arises. When we want others to do something or be a certain way but things don't happen as we wish, anger or sadness arises. Therefore, the cause of anger is our desire, wanting others to be like this or like that, and wanting to get one thing or another. If we don't want to get angry, we have to stop our desire.

We should take up the principle of Dhamma that emphasizes contentment. We choose to be content with

whatever we have, pleased with everything that happens, and satisfied with everything we receive. In this way, we will not get angry. But if instead we are choosy and picky, wanting things to be a particular way, wanting to possess this or that, wanting to become something, or wanting others to be a certain way, then we can get angry when we don't get what we want. So it is better if we are content with whatever comes our way, allowing people to be however they will be, and accepting whatever status that is naturally ours. For example, there is no need to be picky or fussy about the prestige of our work. Whatever our job, whether we are a supervisor or a janitor, is acceptable. Having successfully trained our mind in this way, we will never get angry with anyone.

Anger arises from desire, which comes from delusion, so the root of all problems is delusion. What then is delusion? Delusion is not knowing where true happiness lies. True happiness is found in a peaceful mind. It does not come from getting this or that or having things this way or that way. Millionaires can be just as miserable as

the homeless if they do not know how much is enough, if they are not content with whatever they have and whatever circumstances they find themselves in.

This is something we all have to deal with, because we do not know that to really be happy, we have to train our mind to be content. We have to be satisfied regardless of the situation we face. Wherever we are, whenever it is, we have to train the mind to be always content and amenable. Right now it is hot, so we accept the heat; when it is cold we are pleased that it is cold. When we are praised we happily accept any compliments, and when we are criticized we happily listen to the criticism.

If we are amenable to everything, to all situations all the time, we will have immense happiness. This is the truth that no one knew besides for the Buddha himself. The Buddha discovered this truth that shows that we have all lost our way. We deludedly think that we need to have this or that and gain various things before we can be happy. But really, we need contentment and satisfaction with everything that we come into contact with.

We do not know who we really are, which is another very significant form of delusion. We are fooled by delusion, which leads us to think that we are the body when really the body is not us at all. It is a doll or puppet manipulated by thread. The body is the puppet, and the mind is the one who pulls the strings, the one who makes the body do whatever it wants. Coming to the temple today is caused by the mind. We are the ones who instructed the body to come here, to make merit, and to listen to a Dhamma talk. The mind is the one who gives the orders. We are the ones who give the orders, not the body. The body just follows orders. The mind is the master, and the body is the servant. The mind does not die, but the body has to.

This is the truth that we do not know. We are deluded, thinking that we are the body. We are not aware that we have a mind that is different from the body. We are like a pair of twins. We have two people inside of us: one is real, and the other is just a representative. The body is a representative for the mind, which is the real one. The

reason why we use the body as a substitute is because the mind has no form or feature. We cannot see it with our bare eyes, and so we have to use the body to represent us. To do things with other people or to communicate with them, we have to use our bodies.

But nowadays, we can communicate using other means than the body, such as by phone. The one that communicates is not the body; it's the mind, because it is the mind that thinks and knows all sorts of things. The mind issues its commands through the body so it can communicate via phone. Its thoughts then must be transmitted to another phone whose speakers convey the message to someone's ear before finally reaching the other person's mind. When two minds communicate using a phone there are five steps altogether: from the mind to the body, body to the phone, from one phone to the other, from that phone to another body, and finally from that body to the second mind. This is one way to communicate mind to mind. Since we do not have the ability to communicate directly mind to mind we have to use the body. If we're close to one another person we

can communicate body-to-body, talking normally. If we're far away from one another, we have to use a phone. Therefore, we can see that the body functions merely as a type of telephone.

We are not the body; we are the mind, the one who knows, the one who thinks. It is just that the mind does not have a physical form. Empty space is like the mind, because they are both invisible. However, if there was no mind, the body would not be able to function or perceive anything, just like a corpse that does not have a mind to order it around. You can talk to a dead person until your dying days, but you still won't get a reply, because there is no awareness. Try asking, "Are you hungry? Are you in pain?" There will not be any reply from a dead person, for a dead person is just like a phone that is not able to answer our questions without another person on the other end. The reason why we can talk intelligently with a plastic and metal phone is because there is another person responding on the other end.

Our beliefs about the body are false delusions that we are not even aware of. These delusions are what cause our pain and torment. Because we have the delusion that the body is us, we become tied to it, giving rise to attachment and the desire for the body to live forever since nobody wants to die. We want to live forever. In reality though we already live forever; it is just that we are not aware of it. We do not live forever in the form of the body; we live forever in the form of the mind. When the body dies, the deathless mind lives on. Which state it lives in depends on the state of the mind. If it is in a happy state, it is called a *deva* or *brahma*. If it is in a state of suffering, it is called a hungry ghost or hell being until it again takes a new body.

Having returned to the physical world with a new body, we are once again deluded and think that these new bodies are us, giving rise to the desire for the body to live a long time and to not age, be pained, get sick, or die. When these desires arise, stress and mental pain arise as well because these desires are like knives that stab our hearts. Every time desire arises, we will

immediately feel dissatisfied, irritated, restless, worried, and feverish; we cannot sleep and lose our appetite trying to get what we want. When desire arises, the mind is shaken to its core.

The real problem of the mind is just this desire. And the cause of this desire is delusion. If we do not deludedly believe that the body is us, we will not be bothered by whatever happens to the body. It can age, get sick, be in pain, or die, and we will not suffer at all because we do not have any desire. We treat our body the same as we would treat the body of a stranger. When somebody we don't know passes away, we are not distressed at all. When they are ill, pained, or getting old, we don't suffer, because we do not deludedly think that they are us or belong to us. But if we foolishly think that they are ours, such as our husband, wife, father, mother, son, siblings, or friends, then when something happens to them, we will suffer right along with them, because we do not want them to suffer.

Therefore, we should correct this delusion and continually remind the mind that the body is not a person, but is merely a representative, a puppet or doll that the mind of each of us uses as a tool, just like we use a cell phone. It's possible for us to treat the body in the same way we treat a cell phone. When the body passes away, it's like our cell phone breaks, which we can then replace with a new one. Though the body passes away, we can take a new birth. Whether we will return with a better body or not depends on how much money we have saved away. The currency in this case that can buy us a nice, new body is our merit, (our accumulated good actions). The currency that can buy a new phone is the money that we have right now. If our old cell phone breaks or gets lost, we can afford to buy a better model if we have lots of money, but if we just have a little money, we will only be able to afford a model that isn't as nice as the one that broke. It depends on how much money we have.

In the same way, whether we will get a body that is better or worse than the last body we had depends on

the status of our merit. Do we have a lot of merit? Do we have a lot of demerit? If our demerit (our accumulated unskillful actions) is greater than our merit, then we will first end up in the bodies of animals, such as in a bird, cat, dog, cow, and buffalo until the demerit is reduced and our merit is relatively greater. This merit is the result of doing good and giving up evil in the past. It is the same as when we want to buy something new that is better than what we currently have: our income must exceed our expenses; money deposited in the bank must cover our debts. If our debt is greater than the money in our bank account, we will not be able to buy new things that are better than the old ones. But if we have excess money, we can use it to improve our material condition.

This comparison is given for us to know the causes of growth and decline within our *saṃsāric* existence, to know where birth and death in the various high and low realms comes from. Well, it comes from our good and bad actions. What then is the cause of discontentment and stress in our everyday life? It is our desire and

delusion. We deludedly believe things belong to us, when really they don't, and we wish for things that are plainly impossible, such as wishing that our body will not grow old, get sick, be in pain, or die. It is just not possible for that wish to come true. Once born, it is only natural that all bodies must age, become ill, experience pain, and finally die, regardless of whose bodies they are. Even the Buddha and all of his enlightened disciples have had to age, get sick, experience pain, and die as well. No one is exempt; it is the same for everyone.

The bodies of all of us are the same, composed of the same substances of earth, water, wind, and fire. They all have the same 32 parts of hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, brain, gall, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil in the joints, and finally urine. These are the 32 parts of the body, which are the same for everybody. Once we have them, we will also have birth,

old age, sickness, pain, and death. Once the body dies, it will disintegrate, with the elements returning to their original state. The earth element returns to earth, water returns to water, wind returns to wind, and fire returns to fire, each element going its separate way.

This is the truth that we should frequently contemplate, so that we will not be deludedly attached to the body, thinking it is us or ours. We should study so as to know that this body will have to age, get sick, be in pain, and die. This body is merely earth, water, wind, and fire. It is not us or ours. This body is made from food that comes from earth, water, wind, and fire. Rice, vegetables, and fruit all come from earth, water, wind, and fire. Meat that we eat is produced when the various animals eat enough grass and vegetables to feed their bodies. Consequently, all things come from earth, water, wind, and fire. When they combine, they form the 32 parts of the body, such as our hair and nails, until the time comes for them to disintegrate when each element separates. Water goes its own way. When the body dies, if you leave the corpse out for a little bit, the fluids

begin to seep out. The heat of the body dissipates in the same way. If you touch a dead body, you find that it is no longer warm like it used to be while alive. The air trapped in the body will also escape bit by bit, creating the stench that we smell from a corpse. After being left for a long time the body wrinkles and dries, eventually turning into dust. This is the nature of the body. There is no self. 'I', 'me', or 'myself' cannot be found.

If we wish to know whether we are attached to the body or not, we should closely observe the mind. If we still suffer because of the body, it shows we are still deluded, we are still attached. However, if we are not bothered or disturbed by the body, it shows we are wise and no longer deluded. We know that the body is not us or ours. For instance, when the body grows old, we are not troubled by the aging process. When the body is sick or in pain, we are not burdened by the body's poor condition. When the body dies, we are not bothered by the death of the body. Our mind remains in equanimity. It remains content all the time. It is content with old age, content with sickness and pain, and content with the

death of the body. This is to have wisdom. This is how to correct delusion.

To know whether we have corrected it already or not, we should check our own mind to see whether we still suffer along with the body or not. If we do, it shows we are still deluded. Even though we might have seen the body in its various stages of decomposition, nothing has yet personally happened to our bodies. For example, while we sit meditation, investigating with wisdom, we can see the true nature of the body. Or right now while you are listening to this talk you know that the body is not you or yours, it is like a puppet. But then when your stomach aches, how does your mind react? Does it become disturbed? When you get a headache, are you bothered? When your hair starts to turn grey, are you worried? This is our test. If we want to know whether or not we have seen the truth, whether we can really let go, whether or not we are still deluded, then we should observe the mind that has been made firm. If the mind is still disturbed at all, it shows that delusion is still there.

Therefore, if during meditation we see this vision or that image, it does not mean that we have reached enlightenment, that we have seen Dhamma, or that we are already released from suffering. When we come out of meditation and confront various kinds of situations, our response reveals if we are really enlightened or not. When we face a life or death situation, does our mind waver? Is our mind calm and stable, or is it agitated? This is what really tells us whether or not we have released ourselves from suffering. We can't tell when we're just sitting in our room by ourselves meditating, because during that time nothing has happened to the body. We have to wait until the body gets sick, hurts, or is about to die.

For example, we go to the doctor and after a few tests the doctor tells us we have cancer and gives us just three to six months to live. Then look at how the mind responds. Is it shocked or agitated? Does it lose all motivation to do anything? Or does it just remain equanimous? Perhaps it knows that this is just how it has to be, reflecting on the situation all the time, or

keeping the attitude that if the illness can be treated, then we'll treat; but if it can't be treated, we'll just let it go. People who really know see things in this way. They know without vacillating; they know without agitation; they know without getting upset.

We make merit, practise generosity, maintain the precepts, sit in meditation, and develop wisdom for the sake of entering into a true state of contentment (*santosa*) where the mind is amenable to whatever situation comes its way, regardless of circumstances. The mind is agreeable to whatever happens to the physical bodies of people such as our parents, grandparents, relatives, husbands, wives, and friends. We have to see that the physical bodies of those people are all the same: they are all just puppets; they are merely earth, water, wind, and fire; there is no self. Self is in the mind and orders the body to be a certain way or to do this or that. A self cannot be found in the body; it's found in the mind. The mind does not die along with the body.

When the body dies, instead of suffering, we should consider it a good thing. It is better than lying unbearably in a hospital bed for many months. Why continue living? Wouldn't it be better to throw the body away and replace it with a new one? Why keep using an old cell phone that only sometimes works? Wouldn't it be better to replace it with a new one? If we know that the body is not us, in the same way that we know a cell phone is not us, we can switch it out right away. Why be sad and worry about it? When things don't work well anymore and it comes time for them to go, let them go.

People who know this truth will leave comfortably, die comfortably, and experience pain comfortably. 'Comfortably' here refers to the mind, not the body. If the body is in pain, just let it be. The intensity of physical pain cannot overwhelm the happiness of the mind. If the mind has happiness already, then the physical pain is not an issue. But if the body is comfortable and the mind is not, the physical comfort is not able to overcome the mental discomfort, because mental comfort and discomfort outweighs physical ease and dis-ease many

tens of times over. Therefore, we should not be deluded into excessively taking care of the body, for no matter how much we care for it, we still can't eliminate aging, sickness, pain, or death. It would be better and more profitable for us to whole-heartedly nurture our mind.

To care for the mind we use the methods the Buddha taught that we already practise: giving, maintaining virtue, and calm and insight meditation. Calm (*samatha*) meditation refers to training the mind to be calm and peaceful. For there to be insight, the mind needs to first be calm and peaceful. Otherwise, the mind will not have the strength to accept the truth; it will not have the strength to be able to fight delusion. Delusion will fool us into seeing everything backwards, seeing things as us and ours, believing they will stay with us a long time and that they will provide real happiness. But if we have meditative calm and peace, the mind will be able to accept the Buddha's teaching that nothing is really us or ours and nothing provides real happiness. Actually, these things cause suffering because nothing can stay with us forever.

There has to be both calm (*samatha*) and insight meditation. If we do not first develop meditative concentration (*samādhī*) but jump straight into developing insight, we will end up with fake wisdom that cannot extinguish mental suffering. When sickness and physical pain occur, the mind will get really agitated. When death approaches, the mind will become even more agitated. When old age sets in, the mind will be similarly troubled.

The wisdom we gain from listening to the Dhamma talk right now is not true wisdom. It is merely the preliminary wisdom that leads to true wisdom. We have to take it and put it into practise. We have to develop meditative calm first, making the mind peaceful. Once we can make the mind peaceful, we can then use the knowledge that we have gained to teach the mind, which will then be able to accept the truth. When old age sets in the mind will not be upset. When sickness and pain sets in the mind will not be agitated. When death comes the mind will not be agitated. If one is not

agitated, it shows that there is true wisdom. It has to be wisdom that arises from real-life situations, from actually experiencing old age, sickness, pain, and death.

This is something that we should develop a lot, which is called the path (*magga*) and consists of generosity, virtue, and meditation. Once we have developed the path, we will have the strength to be able to stop our cravings and desires. These desires are like knives that stab our hearts. We will be able to pull out knife after knife from our hearts until they are all gone; we will be able to eliminate whatever desires there may be, such as wanting this thing to be like that or that person to act in such and such a way. Without such desires in our hearts, we will become content, satisfied with whatever is available and with whatever we get, be it praise or criticism, rewards or punishments. If something is going to happen, we cannot stop it; we just have to let it happen. We are content with old age, sickness, pain, and death. We're content with warm weather like we have now.

We don't need to go find a fan or an air-conditioner to install, because it's all too much trouble. It's better to install a fan or air-conditioner in our heart, which is our own contentment. Having contentment is like having air-conditioning for the heart. Having a cool heart is better than just having a cool body, because if the body is cool but the heart is hot, we will still be hot even in a nice air-conditioned room. The heat of the heart is much greater than that of the body. Therefore, may we see how important it is to look after and take care of the heart, making sure there is only coolness, peace, and happiness. We do this by practicing meditation in line with the teachings of the Buddha in a continuous manner, every day and every moment, and not just on important days or when we don't have to work. In reality we can meditate every day, because we already have enough time to be generous, maintain virtue, and meditate to calm the mind. It's just that we don't do it, that's all. Instead, we use our time to seek agitation and trouble by watching movies, listening to music, drinking alcohol, and taking trips to various places. These are

what cause the mind to be irritated and uncomfortable since we act out our desire.

But if we act following the example of the Buddha, we act to stop desire. We begin to extract the knives lodged in our hearts. However many we can remove only leads to greater mental ease and happiness. No one can do this for us. However many we extract, however quickly, is dependent on our actions. Doing a lot, we will get a lot and progress quickly; doing a little, we will get a little and progress slowly.

Therefore, it is beneficial for us to put in more effort because our existence is uncertain. We do not know how much longer we will have the opportunity to practise. Now we have the time, so we should hurry to practise before we miss our chance. We should take advantage of this fortunate opportunity, because when the time comes for us to die, sickness and pain will prevent us from meditating.

May you contemplate these words and put them into practise for the sake of your long-term welfare and happiness. Since this Dhamma talk has lasted the allocated time, may I ask to stop for now. If you have any questions or do not understand anything, you may ask.

Questions & Answers

Question: What if we are too lazy to meditate? Are there techniques we can use to push ourselves to practise?

Ajaan: There are, but if you don't use them, they won't do you any good. There are a number of techniques we can use. The first method is to always reflect on death: consider that we may die today, or if not today, then tomorrow, and once we're dead we will not be able to meditate. We can see meditation as similar to digging for gold, only that the gold we find in meditation is more valuable than all the material gold in the world, because

the wealth of Dhamma is something that we can take with us even after we die.

Whether or not we depart this world comfortably and go to a good place is dependent on the effort we put into 'digging for gold' presently. The work of generosity, keeping our virtue, and meditating results in wealth that goes along with us, which is called inner or noble wealth. If we do not practise, we will depart like beggars. Once dead we will have to wait for merit from people who dedicate it to us. If they do not offer us any, we will have to fast that day. Whenever they make merit for us, we can then receive it, which is similar to begging. But if we keep up our practise, we will depart like a millionaire, leaving with lots of wealth. We will be free to do whatever we want, buy anything, and go wherever we choose. We should think in this way.

The time that is available to us is gradually diminishing and no one knows when it will all end. In a day or so we might fall sick, become paralyzed so we can't do anything, or pass away. Once we're dead, we will not be

able to do anything. We'll have to go receive the results of whatever good or bad actions we have done until they are all depleted and we return to a new birth. Having taken a new birth, there is no certainty that we will encounter Buddhism again, because it does not always exist in the world. It arises only after a very long time and does not last for long. It is like when we light a match stick: it doesn't burn for even a minute before going out. Buddhism arises in the world in the same way that we strike a match only once after a long, long time. It is very uncertain whether we will meet Buddhism again. In our next life we don't know if we'll encounter Buddhism. We don't know how many hundreds or millions of times we'll have to be reborn in order to meet Buddhism again. If we do not come across Buddhism, we will not meet anyone who can teach in this manner. If there are other religions, they will only be able to lead people up to the *Brahma* worlds.

When Prince Siddhartha first left to seek the truth Buddhism didn't exist, so there wasn't anyone who knew the path that would end the cycle of birth and death. The

Buddha had to seek the path himself. If there had not been someone like the Buddha, we would not have the path that leads to the end of the round of rebirths. Buddhism would not have arisen for all of us to rely on and use as a map to guide us. Right now, we have the great fortune to have maps and guides to point the way leading to great treasure that we can consume and spend without ever depleting it. That is expressed in the Pali phrase, “*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*”. Nibbāna is the highest happiness. No matter how much we use and spend, it will never be depleted.

If there wasn't Buddhism, then we would only be able to acquire wealth that expires and declines after some time, such as the wealth of the *Brahma* and heavenly *devas*. Once we lose the wealth of the *Brahma* and heavenly realms, we will have to be reborn as humans again; we will have to search for gold again, to accumulate merit again. If there isn't Buddhism when we return to this world, we will only be able to discover the treasure that does not last, such as that of the *Brahma* and heavenly realms, and we will still cycle through the

round of birth and death. And this is only for those who devote themselves to developing goodness. As for those who are not inclined to devote themselves to goodness but instead choose to drink alcohol, gamble, go out at all hours of the night, kill living beings, steal, commit sexual misconduct, tell lies, and cheat, after death those people will fall into hell or be reborn as hungry ghosts or animals. Once their store of demerit is depleted, they will return as humans again and continue to create more bad *kamma*, drinking alcohol, gambling, enjoying all-night entertainment, associating with people who are bad influences, and once again they'll tend to be lazy.

It is this laziness that pulls us down into ruin. When we are lazy, we should remind ourselves of the teaching of the Buddha that says laziness is one of the five causes that leads to our downfall and ruin. These five causes are drinking intoxicants, gambling, going to entertainment all through the night, associating with and befriending bad people, and finally laziness. If we do not want to end up in a bad destination, we must be sure to

cut off laziness and all these other ruinous activities. Don't get involved with these things. Don't drink intoxicants; don't gamble; don't stay out all night seeking entertainment; and don't associate with bad people who themselves like to gamble and enjoy all-night entertainment, who delight in killing living beings, cheating, committing sexual misconduct, and being slothful and lazy. Don't associate with them. Don't allow laziness to dwell within us. We should eliminate it. Just like the HIV virus: we should not allow it to enter or stay in our bodies. Otherwise, the end result will only be death. People who carry the HIV virus usually end up dead. It is only recently that there are medicines that can help those who are infected to live, but the drugs have to be taken indefinitely. If we think in this way, we will not be lazy.

We should remember, "*Attāhi attana nātho*", or oneself is one's own refuge. No one can do this for us. It is the same as eating: If we do not eat, we will never be full. Do we want to go hungry, or do we want to be full? If we want to be full, we should try to eat. Even on days when

we do not feel like eating, we should force ourselves to eat, because we know that if we do not, we will later be hungry. We should think that if we are too lazy to meditate, we will have to suffer. Thinking in this manner, we will become more diligent and energetic.

Question: Sometimes bad and unwise thoughts arise by themselves without any intention on my part. Even though I try to suppress them or cut them off, they still continue to arise.

Ajaan: You have to practise developing mindfulness a lot, because once you have mindfulness you will be able to control all your various thoughts. For instance, if we maintain the mantra '*Buddho*' continuously, all types of thoughts, whether good or bad, will not arise. At the beginning we should try to wipe out all thoughts, both good and bad, but especially our thoughts that are unskillful. So using the mantra '*Buddho*' to eliminate thinking is the best option. It will decrease the proliferation of all our various thoughts until we can ultimately stop them. Once we can stop them all, we can

direct the mind to think only what is skilful and helpful. When unskilful thoughts arise, we can pull the mind back to only think in a skilful manner. Right now we do not have the strength to control our own thoughts, so we should not develop insight yet, because we will not get real insight. Some insights may arise initially, but later they will turn into ignorance and increase our defilements.

Thus, we should first develop mindfulness to be able to control our thoughts and to stop them completely. Once we are able to stop and direct our thoughts we will be able to think in the right way. We need to have concentration (*samādhī*) before we can develop insight and teach the mind to consider the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, suffering, and not-self. If we don't yet have concentration, but try to see things in terms of impermanence, stress, and not-self, then what happens is that we contemplate for just two or three minutes before the mind begins to think about other things instead. After just a little bit the mind wants to get something or to experience something, so it doesn't get

any results. However, if we already have concentration, we will be able to think in a skilful way continuously. If we try to teach our mind, but it refuses to go in that way, it means our concentration has lost its strength, so we have to stop and return to develop concentration.

It is similar to when a battery needs to be recharged, because if we use our mind continuously, the strength of its concentration can be depleted. When it ceases to see things in terms of the three characteristics of existence, it starts thinking in the way of the world. So we have to stop it and return to develop concentration and calm down the mind. Once the mind is calm again, we can gradually come out of *samādhi* and direct it to develop wisdom, once again thinking in a skilful way. We keep practising in this manner continuously so that soon the mind will naturally go in the way of insight and develop wisdom automatically. Luangta Maha Boowa said in his Dhamma talks that continuous practise leads to automatic insight, to thinking only in terms of wisdom.

But in the beginning it's hit or miss: sometimes we think in terms of wisdom, and sometimes we don't. At that stage, it's like we are children. But if we teach ourselves, practise, and think in terms of wisdom continuously, then we will see the good results that come from thinking in the way of wisdom, in a skilful way that leads to letting go. Our conviction will grow stronger, as will the joy we take in developing wisdom, until finally we only see things in terms of wisdom, immediately seeing the three characteristics of existence. Whatever we see, we see it as loathsome and unattractive right away. When we see somebody, we won't think they are beautiful. Even if celebrities show up right in front of us, we will still be able to see them as unattractive and loathsome.

So if we keep thinking and contemplating in this way, we will only see people as unattractive and loathsome in the future, because they are merely covered by the skin. If we contemplate and investigate continuously, we can cut open the chest and see, "Oh! There're just these lungs, this heart, a liver, kidneys, and intestines." We

contemplate this continuously and eventually we will see right through anyone. Even though sunlight can't penetrate the skin, the radiance of insight can go straight through. The light of wisdom is stronger than the brightness of the sun. If we are still not able to direct the mind to develop wisdom, we have to first be able to make our mind calm. To really develop wisdom in a way that gives results, we have to do it continuously, all the time, from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to sleep. The mind should think in terms of wisdom until it can catch up with the defilements. Because as it stands now the mind already thinks in line with the defilements all day long.

Therefore, we have to fight all the time. If we work only some of the time, how will we be able to fight them? We should contemplate constantly until it becomes automatic. Every instant and every moment, whatever we see, we should see it all in terms of wisdom and Dhamma so that the defilements cannot find an opening to arise. Ignorance will not have the opportunity to arise. Thoughts of 'I' and 'mine' will not be able to arise.

Thoughts that someone's body is beautiful will not be able to arise. Thoughts that the body will stay for a long time will not be able to arise. The truth is actually within our heart all the time: the truth of impermanence, suffering, and not self. But right now, it's hardly there at all. We should go to a funeral so that we will be reminded that one day we too will have to die, just like the person in the casket. But even after that, in a day or two we have already forgotten about it and go back to happily partying as we were before. Initially, though, when the death occurred we couldn't even eat or sleep out of grief.

A person came and told me that when she was arranging her birthday party a relative became sick and was taken to the hospital. So she stopped planning the party because her heart wasn't in it. But after a while she forgot about her relative and went ahead with a belated birthday celebration since she was no longer sad. But if we have wisdom, our minds won't be inclined to arrange parties in the first place, because they aren't

deluded and don't want to find happiness in temporary things such as the body.

Therefore, we first need to have concentration (*samādhi*) before our contemplation can yield insight. This should be continuous, like how the Buddha taught Ananda to reflect on death. The Buddha said we should reflect on it every moment, with each in and out breath, for it be considered wisdom. If we reflect on it only once or twice, three or four times a day, it is not considered wisdom; we are still being heedless. To not be heedless we should reflect on death with every in and out breath. Once we can do this, we won't give rise to the desire to live a long time, for we know that it is not possible. We will live within our means using whatever is available to us. The mind will be content.

The more we know that nothing is really us or ours, the less we will be troubled, because when something doesn't belong to us then whatever happens to it is its own business. But right now we are still attached to things, believing them to be us and ours. We have to be

able to correct this delusion. If we can, we'll be at ease. We'll live with this body in the same way that we live with someone else's body. Whatever happens to someone else's body doesn't bother us, so whatever happens to our own body doesn't bother us either. This is the cultivation of wisdom or insight.

At the beginning we need solid concentration. Then we develop wisdom, alternating back and forth between developing concentration and wisdom. After a period of contemplation, thinking can proliferate and our mental strength can become depleted, so we have to let the mind enter concentration and rest again. Once our practice reaches the stage where we can develop wisdom, we have to carefully balance and alternate between wisdom and concentration. However, in the beginning we have to be careful to alternate between developing mindfulness and concentration. In the beginning we cultivate mindfulness by repeating *Buddho, Buddho*. When we sit in meditation and the mind is calm, we stay in concentration. When we come out, we return to cultivating mindfulness. We do this until

we enter concentration easily, rapidly, and with great skill. It is at that point that we can say we have concentration. We can enter concentration any time we want. We sit down, close our eyes, and concentrate for just a few seconds, or just a few minutes, and the mind becomes still. Only in this way can we say we have concentration.

Do not be afraid about what other people might say, worrying that you'll get addicted to concentration, because right now you don't even have concentration at all. So how can you get addicted? But if you already have it, you should also be able to maintain it for a long time, be skilled in entering and leaving concentration, and be able to sit anytime, all the time. But if you do not cultivate wisdom after leaving concentration, then that is being addicted to concentration.

As kids we first master walking before starting to run. We don't take our first steps and then start running right away. If we try to run, we fall. We first walk until we are skilled at it, until our feet become strong. Once they are

strong, we can begin to run. In the same way we first develop mindfulness and make it continuous. Once it is stable and the time comes to sit in meditation, the mind can settle down. We should often practise meditation until we are experts, so that whenever we want to enter concentration we will be able to do so. If we're skilled, sometimes we don't even need to sit, but can enter it wherever we are. We don't have to fold our legs and close our eyes. Sometimes we can just direct the mind to stop thinking and it will stop and become peaceful. Once we are able to do this, we can then gradually come out of concentration and direct the mind to develop wisdom. By working with wisdom and developing insight we will be able to cut the defilements, extinguish discontentment, and be released from all suffering.

These are the different stages of meditation. Mindfulness has to come before concentration. Concentration comes before wisdom. And wisdom leads to the extinguishing of discontentment and the end of all suffering.

Question: Than Ajaan, what about walking meditation?

Ajaan: It is the same. Walking meditation has two purposes. Walking for the sake of cultivating mindfulness and walking for the sake of developing wisdom. Which purpose we choose depends on whether or not we have concentration. If we are not yet able to attain concentration, then we should cultivate mindfulness in order to do so. If this is the case, then as we walk, we shouldn't allow the mind to think in terms of wisdom, but only allow it to think *Buddho, Buddho*, or to closely watch the movements of the body, such as observing the feet, noting whether the left or right foot is hitting the ground. We do this to prevent the mind from thinking about this or that issue.

Question: Should this be done alternately with sitting meditation?

Ajaan: After you walk for some time and you start to ache, you have to sit, don't you? If you are stiff from

sitting, get up and walk. The purpose of meditation is to restrain and control your thoughts in order to make the mind peaceful, at least on the level of entering concentration. Once we have attained concentration and come out of it, we might be sore and stiff from sitting a long time so we can then again do walking meditation. But this time instead of observing the movements of the body, watching the left or right foot, or repeating *Buddho, Buddho*, we can contemplate the body. We contemplate the 32 parts of the body, its loathsomeness, its nature to be born, age, sicken, and die, how it is composed of earth, water, wind, and fire. We contemplate continuously until we see that the body is just another doll that we have possessed and taken as ours temporarily. It is just like a cell phone. We have to look at it in this way until we can really see it, until we can let it go, until we are no longer bothered or fear old age, pain, or death. No matter where we are, no matter how alone, we'll be able to stay. We will feel no fear.

Question: If we reach the stage where we no longer fear death, where do we go from there?

Ajaan: We continue by giving up sexual craving. First though we should be able to give up the fear of pain by sitting in meditation until the whole body is in pain and then letting it subside on its own without changing our position. We train the mind to be content, to accept whatever comes our way. If there's pain, then let it be painful. If we can live with physical pain, then in the future when the body is sick and in poor condition, we will not be agitated. We won't have to rush to a doctor or to take medicine for the pain; we just let it leave on its own. If the pain or sickness does not go away, then we let the body pass away. We don't need to worry that there won't be enough money to pay for our medical treatment. We already have the medicine of Dhamma as our method of treatment, which is to let go of the body and let the problem resolve itself, if that's possible. If it doesn't go away, then we can't really do anything anyway. Since we have already accepted death, why fear? If there is no fear of death, then there cannot be any fear of pain.

We should practise living with the pain by sitting in meditation for hours upon hours without moving and without getting up. We should try to train the mind to be able to let go of pain. We should not want the pain to go away, otherwise our mind will be disturbed. The mind cannot endure pain because it fears it, dislikes it, and wants it to go away. If such feelings arise and the mind is not able to endure them, we have to train the mind to like the pain so that we will be able to live with it. Some people like to eat chilli peppers, and some don't. People who like to eat chilli peppers don't find them too hot; they think they're delicious. But people who don't like eating them suffer greatly. It just depends on whether we like them or not. Therefore, whenever we dislike anything, we should choose to like it instead, so that our mind will become contented and satisfied

If we can overcome our fear of pain, sickness, and death, then we can then address sexual craving. If there is still the desire to have sex with this or that person, we should contemplate the unattractive and ugly aspects of the body, seeing the body as the same as a corpse. It is

just that at this moment the body is still breathing. If it stopped breathing, would we still want to sleep with it? See the people around you as corpses. We can visit a charnel ground when they are clearing it to see how our bodies really are. If we frequently think in this manner and look at the truth, seeing all of the disgusting aspect, we will then be able to extinguish sexual craving. Look straight through the body to see the stomach, liver, intestines, and those disgusting things that are excreted from the body. Then, as a result of our investigation we will extinguish sexual craving.

These are the problems that go along with the body that we have to address: fear of pain, fear of death, love for someone's body, and seeing it as beautiful. We solve this last problem by not seeing their body as beautiful and instead looking at their unattractive aspects. There are two sides to them. If we look at those aspects that are beautiful, sexual desire will arise. If we look at those aspects that are unattractive, sexual desire disappears. When there is sexual desire, the mind is irritated, lonely, and depressed, and we won't be able to live by

ourselves. When a couple is separated, how do they feel?

There was a person whose husband passed away and became very distressed. She said she had never suffered like that before and had never known what suffering was like until when her husband died, because she didn't expect him to die in the middle of his life. He was just 50 years old when he passed away. They happily lived together for 30 years. And now that he has passed away, she can't eat, sleep, or stop thinking about him, even though she knows that he has already passed on.

These are the issues concerning the body that we all encounter. If we can solve these problems, the body won't cause us any problems. If we can overcome these obstacles, we won't need to contemplate the body anymore. We can go on to investigate the problems related to the mind, because at the moment the mind still has defilements, delusions, an ego, a sense of self, and a love of happiness, a happiness that is not stable

or reliable. The self is not a genuine self. This should be investigated again and again so as to see that the happiness of the mind is not real and must be discarded. There is no self. 'Self' is a delusion generated by the mind and has to be discarded. Don't cling to it or take it as 'me' or 'mine'. If someone is rude or disrespectful, we don't need to become agitated, because there is no self. The mind is the one who knows, but it is not yourself. We simply know that they criticise or belittle us. That's all. If we react, it shows that we still believe in the illusion of a self, that we still desire to be someone important, to have fame and influence. These are delusions inside the mind. First though, we have to pass through the body. We should be able to let go of the body before we work on the mind. Take this and put it into practise. If it is not like this, come back and let me know.

Question: You mentioned before that when we pass away, if we have lots of bad *kamma*, we can be born as animals, and if we have lots of good *kamma* we can be born as humans. We get a human birth because we

have such great merit. Now, if we are to be reborn again as a human, do we have a choice regarding which country we're born in, or whether we are born in a rich or poor family?

Ajaan: We don't get to choose; our merit and *kamma* arranges things for us, in the same way that our score on a standardized test determines which universities we can enter. Doing lots of good deeds will allow us to attend a good university. If we score well, we will be able to get what we want. But if we haven't done enough good, then it won't be possible. When the time comes, we cannot point and choose where we want to go. But by making a lot merit we will get a lot in return; we will get many things that we want. However, we cannot choose the place, like choosing to be born a Westerner or an African. Sometimes it just depends on what opportunities are available, like when we are looking for a place to park our car, we cannot choose where we want to park. Whatever slot is empty, we take, no matter how far it is from our destination, because it is better than not having a space to park at all. Sometimes it

depends on what's available, and sometimes on the merit or demerit that we have made.

There are many causes and supporting conditions, but what is certain is merit. If we are born to parents of ill health, we will end up with poor health as well. But if our mind has merit, we can still be happy. Our mind will not be agitated by whatever happens to the body. People with merit will be cool and contented, not pessimistic, negative, or troubled at all. People lacking merit will be critical, wanting this or that, and no matter how much they get they will still be unhappy. Some children born to very wealthy families are still unhappy because they are overly critical and never satisfied. Whatever they get, it's still not enough. But people who are not picky or critical, those who are content and at peace, will not be bothered even if they are born the child of beggars. We can be happy no matter what our circumstances are.

So do not be too worried about status or possessions, and don't be fixated on the physical body, but give some attention to the mind as well. If we have a calm mind,

then being born into a poor family is better because it will be easy to ordain. A child of wealthy parents who have a lot of assets won't want to allow their child to ordain. In the time of the Buddha there was a son of a wealthy family who wanted to ordain. But his parents wouldn't let him because he was their only son, and if he ordained, they didn't know who they would give their wealth to. Even after pleading with his parents, they still wouldn't allow it. In the end, he refused to eat and his parents had to relent and allowed him to ordain. It shows that his mind had a strong determination to ordain and a strong devotion to peace and calm. He had probably been a monk before, practicing meditation and gaining a peace that he really liked, so these habits became part of his character that carried over into that lifetime. This is a high level of practise.

So we should try to practise to a high level, right up to the level of concentration and wisdom. The level of generosity and virtue is good, but even after mastering them we are still not satisfied. No matter what we get, we can still be irritated and want things that we don't

have. But if we have a mind that is already at peace, then it won't really be 'hungry' or desire much; it will have joy and contentment.

Therefore, we should try to do a lot. Be generous, maintain virtue, practise concentration, and develop wisdom. Do it gradually and things will progress by themselves. Be more generous; don't regret giving away possessions and wealth. Instead of using money to buy various types of happiness, it is better to use it to make merit. Instead of travelling or going out, use the money to make merit. Suppose we want to use some money to buy a new handbag or a pair of shoes when we already have a shelf full of handbags and shoes: it is better to use that money making merit, whether at a temple, school, hospital, charitable organization, or any other place that benefits people. The only condition is that it is done for the sake of others and not for ourselves. If it is done for ourselves, then it is like buying addictive drugs. No matter how much we get, it'll never be enough. Buying a handbag today, we'll want another one tomorrow. But if we don't buy it today, then we won't

want to buy it tomorrow because we'll see that using money to make merit gives us much more happiness.

Seeing others who are suffering overcome their problems and become happy again gives us happiness and contentment. We'll see that making merit is better than the happiness we get from buying all kinds of things that we don't really need. We should try to avoid using our money to buy things that aren't necessary, because it is similar to buying addictive drugs. No matter how much we buy, it still won't be enough. So instead we use the money to make merit, making the mind satisfied and contented. The mind will then be filled with love and kindness, and won't want to trouble or harming other people, so maintaining virtue will be very easy.

People who cannot yet maintain virtue have minds lacking in merit; they still do not appreciate goodness and want to get this and that. Moreover, they want to obtain things easily, and the easy way is to break the precepts by lying, cheating, and deceiving. But people who do not desire wealth won't think in that way,

because even having gained great wealth, what would they do with it? Even then, they would still give their money to others because there is just too much, or because it came to them on its own without having to search and struggle for it.

But there is also no need to waste time by earning extra money in order to give to others; making merit doesn't mean we have to seek money to give away. The purpose of earning money is to take care of ourselves. But maybe in the process of earning money we acquire more than is really necessary to take care of our body, so the extra can be distributed to other people. Don't hoard it, because that does not bring any benefit and ends up being a burden on the mind, making us worried and possessive. People concerned with money aren't happy; when their money is lost their minds become depressed. But when people who are not worried about money make merit they are filled with happiness. Such a mind will have loving kindness and compassion, and will be able to maintain their virtue. With virtue, the mind will be cool and calm, and then it will be able to cultivate

mindfulness, sit in meditation, and bring the mind to stillness. These are practices that all support each other.

So do not make merit for the sake of getting this or that; instead do it for the purpose of cutting off the defilements and reducing desire. After a while of doing this we will not want to be rich. Do you understand? People who want to be rich do not come to make merit because the two activities go in opposite directions. People who make merit want to be poor and want just a little money so they don't have to look after it and be troubled by it. Increasing our loving kindness and ability to maintain virtue is the purpose of making merit, which enables us to climb higher and higher up to more advanced stages. Once we can maintain our virtue, we will be able to meditate and stay in the temple. If we can maintain the five precepts, we can then keep the eight precepts and practise developing concentration. With concentration, we will be able to cultivate wisdom. And with wisdom, we will be able to extinguish suffering and discontentment.

Therefore, do not make merit for the sake of getting rich or to get this or that, such as those who are sick and try to heal themselves by making merit. Making merit cannot cure illness. If you want treatment, you should see a doctor and stay in the hospital. Making merit doesn't cure illness or allow us to live into old age. But doing good deeds is like making payments on an instalment plan for a new body, as if we were paying for a new condo. The old building is dilapidated, and is in the process of collapsing. Our old body is breaking down, so we must switch it for a new one.

Making merit is like an instalment plan to pay for a new body. In this way, after we die we'll get a body that's better than the old one. Furthermore, we train the mind to be calm and unconcerned about its possessions or wealth. If we are not worried about our wealth, when we die we can go peacefully. However, if we are still worried and anxious, we will die with a troubled mind, thinking about who should inherit our wealth.

Therefore, we should try to arrange our assets and wealth so that we can live and die peacefully. Do not be too concerned about wealth because it doesn't buy us a long life free of disease. If an illness can't be cured, no matter how much money you might spend, the body will still won't recover. Seek treatment in line with what is commonly available. If the body can be healed, it will be healed; otherwise it will die. All of us will have to die sooner or later. So it is better for us to pay attention to our mental comfort and happiness, to live with a peaceful and trouble-free mind, to live content with whatever is available to us. Even if the body is sick and painful, we live with it and are content with it. Do not let desire arise for the sickness or pain to vanish, for doing that is like stabbing the heart with a dagger and causes mental pain to arise.

The Duty of a Disciple

April 7, 2013

The reason why we have Dhamma books and recorded talks is because before we can be able to meditate we must first study the various techniques of how to do it. If we haven't first studied the right techniques of meditation, our practice will sometimes be right and sometimes be wrong, which gives erratic results. It will not be possible to achieve the results attained by the Buddha and his noble disciples. It's not possible for everyday people who have not yet acquired the mindfulness and wisdom, the knowledge and ability that will enable us to actually reach the highest Dhamma. This is the reason why sentient beings are trapped in the round of perpetual birth and death, the reason we must go through birth, sickness, aging, and death, and be oppressed by all kinds of matters. With the exception of the Buddhas, no one in the world is able to achieve enlightenment by themselves. Therefore if there weren't any meditation masters to teach us, then we would not be able to practice all the way to the level of *Nibbāna*.

Therefore, studying under a meditation master (Krupa Ajaan), or learning from the Buddha or his noble disciples, is absolutely necessary, especially for those who are really interested, and want to escape the endless round of rebirth.

‘*Savaka*’ or ‘noble disciple’ refers to one who listens. There are two types of *Arahants*. The first is ‘*Arahant Sammāsam Buddha*’ who achieves enlightenment by himself. The second is ‘*Arahant Savaka*’ (noble disciples) who have to listen to the teachings of the Buddha before they can attain enlightenment. Therefore, in Buddhism there can only be one person who is able to attain enlightenment by himself without learning from anyone else, and this is the person who we call the Buddha. After his enlightenment the Buddha took the truth he discovered and shared it with others. Those who received his teachings put them into practice, and subsequently they too were able to attain enlightenment.

Once they reached the level of *Arahant*, they were called ‘*Arahant Savaka*’, not ‘*Arahant Sammāsam Buddha*’, because they did not become enlightened by themselves but rather through the power of the Buddha’s teachings. ‘*Savaka*’ means one who listens. All of us are also like the ‘*savaka*’ disciples, because before we are able to meditate correctly, we have to listen first. We have to know the right technique of meditation. If we don’t know the right technique, then our meditation practice will not succeed, and it will not lead us to the path and fruition of *Nibbāna* that we are aiming for.

Therefore, the Buddha taught us that first we need *pariyatti*, which is the study of the Buddha’s teachings. There are many ways that we can learn. You may study directly with the Buddha if you are born while he is still alive. For instance, when the Buddha first began to teach he personally gave Dhamma talks. The first group that heard a discourse was the five ascetics. After the talk Phra Annakodana attained to the eye of Dhamma; he reached the level of *Sotāpanna* (stream-entry), the

first stage of enlightenment. Subsequently, after another one or two discourses, they all attained full enlightenment.

After teaching the five ascetics, the Buddha went to teach other practitioners in various places. One time he gave a talk to about 500 recluses, and all of them attained *Arahantship* instantly after the Buddha completed his discourse. The reason that they could listen to one talk and attain *Arahantship* right away is that they already possessed important qualities such as morality (*sīla*) and concentration (*samādhi*). When they listened to the Dhamma, which is an aspect of wisdom, it enabled them to become enlightened as an *Arahant*. If people listen to a Dhamma talk, but don't achieve enlightenment, it shows that they do not yet possess morality and concentration, or perhaps only have morality but not concentration. Without concentration, no matter how many discourses they hear, they will not be able to attain enlightenment.

As it was in the past, so it is now. All of us have been listening to Dhamma talks until our ears hurt, but our mind is still not enlightened. Our mind is not calm enough; it is not firmly established. Our mind should be equanimous and should merely know. If the mind is neutral, it will have strength to fight against the defilements (*kilesas*) and cravings (*taṇhā*) that create stress in the mind. So if we listen to Dhamma but don't achieve enlightenment, it shows that we have not meditated to the level that will allow us to gain enlightenment. Before we can gain wisdom from listening to Dhamma talks, our mind must first be calm and equanimous. It should be unified, merely knowing, *ekaggatā aroṃ*; it should be neutral and equanimous, satisfied, blissful, and happy. If we have not yet reached that point, we should first try to meditate to that level.

Before we can meditate to that level of concentration, our morality needs to be pure, which means, we should be able to safeguard the 5, 8, or 227 precepts or training rules. For if the mind is not yet able to maintain the training rules, it will not have enough peace to be able to

develop the mindfulness needed to attain concentration. Before we can maintain our morality, we should make merit and be generous. We have to be able to give up our material possessions and wealth, without clinging to or worrying about them. We should not be deluded into thinking that our possessions and wealth cause happiness. Instead we should see that possessions and wealth bring stress; they are the causes that make it impossible for us to maintain our morality.

Those who still crave for possessions and wealth, who still want to be rich and wealthy, will feel that maintaining morality is a hindrance, because it makes it harder to get rich. To accumulate wealth quickly and easily you have to forget about the precepts; you have to cheat, lie, and swindle your way to a tremendous amount of money. If our mind still craves for possessions and wealth, still wants to be rich and wealthy, still wants to use money to buy happiness, then we will not be able to safeguard our morality. This will in turn cause difficulties when we try to calm ourselves during meditation. In addition, our involvement with seeking and spending

money will take up our time that we could have used to practice Dhamma, to develop mindfulness, and to sit in meditation. Because to really be able to develop our meditation we have to stay in a quiet and peaceful environment that is secluded and far away from disturbances such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, which seduce and deceive the mind, causing all sorts of emotions and desires to arise.

Therefore if we want to practice correctly with virtue and concentration, so that we can accept the wisdom of the Buddha's teachings, then it is necessary that we do not seek happiness by using money. When we stop using money to buy all sorts of happiness, it will then be unnecessary for us to seek for more and more money. We will only need to seek enough for the four basic requisites that we require to sustain our physical body. There will then be plenty of free time to spend in seclusion, maintaining our virtue, and meditating to calm the mind. Once we have a state of concentration and have learned the teachings of the Buddha by studying the *Pali* canon, reading books by the various meditation

masters, or listening to Dhamma talks from other reliable sources, we will then be able to attain enlightenment.

Therefore, studying the teachings is incredibly important. For example, listening to the Dhamma talk today is one way to learn. It is like reviewing a map and examining the path that leads to our destination. We have to know which path goes to the correct destination. If we don't have a map and have never travelled to that place before, we will not be able to reach our destination. Similarly, we practise meditation with the aim of attaining *Nibbāna*, which is a path that requires a map or a guide, such as a meditation master. If we can stay and study under a teacher, we can then learn the meditation techniques that lead us along the right path. Once we have practiced correctly, we will be able to reach the destination we are aiming for.

In regards to the Buddhist path, study is given great importance. For instance, the Buddha required newly-ordained monks to stay with a teacher for a minimum of

five years. They have to stay and study under a meditation master, because if they practise without guidance they can go astray. It is similar to flying: before a pilot can fly he has to study the proper way to fly from someone who is more experienced. If he sits in the control seat and fires up the engine to taxi, thinking that he knows what he is doing because he can drive a car, he will not be able to safely and successfully take off.

In the same way, before laypeople ordain as monks they know how to do all sorts of things. After they ordain, they don't think it is necessary to study, to stay and train under a meditation master. They think that they can go ahead and practice by themselves. Nowadays monks ordain and do not stay with a meditation master, but instead establish a meditation centre with themselves as an abbot. After not too long we hear about some scandal. This is because they have not studied under a meditation master who could teach them the proper way to live as a monk.

People who have only recently ordained cannot yet be considered real monks; they are only monks in appearance. They shave their heads and put on an orange robe, but their minds are the same as the average person. It is as Luangta Boowa has said, “Our defilements have no fear of orange robes and bald heads. Don’t think that by just having shaved your head or by wearing an orange robe that the defilements will immediately die. Defilements are still full within the heart.” So it is necessary to study with a meditation master, to learn how to overcome the defilements, the correct way of living as a renunciant, how to behave and how to follow the Vinaya that includes 227 training rules, and to learn how to practice Dhamma correctly. Learning all of this requires an extended period of time of at least five years.

For those staying with Luangta Maha Boowa, monks with fewer than five rains retreats would not be allowed to go out. In addition, some monks were not allowed to leave, even though they had stayed with him for more than five years already. If he saw that they were not

ready to live by themselves, then he wouldn't let them go. This is because new monks are just like newly-delivered infants who have to stay with their parents. They have to first be taught by the parents how to eat, use the bathroom, walk, sit, stand, and do all sorts of things before they are mature adults who can understand and handle various situations. In general society people have to be 21 years-old before they are legally independent. In the same way, monks must first study the theoretical aspects of the Dhamma and Vinaya. They learn how to act in only moral ways befitting a monk, which has to go hand in hand with the mental aspect of the meditation practice, the path of Dhamma. What we learn from listening to Dhamma is actually both Dhamma and Vinaya. Vinaya refers to morality, and Dhamma means the teachings that can enable us to practise the path and achieve the fruit of *Nibbāna*.

Therefore, it does not matter whether we are monks or laypeople. If we want to progress on the Buddhist path, it is necessary to study and learn. Laypeople need to

study under a meditation master just like monks do. Once they have a meditation teacher, they will be able to correctly understand various matters and use their knowledge to meditate in the right way, leading naturally to positive results.

The first step along the Buddhist path is *pariyatti*, gaining theoretical knowledge by studying the Buddha's discourses. The second step is *paṭipadā*, to practice the Dhamma we have learnt. The third step is *pativedha* (fruition), to achieve a level of enlightenment at which point we will know for ourselves the way of practice that leads to further levels of enlightenment. Once we have become enlightened, we may proceed to the fourth step of spreading the Buddha's teachings to those who are still ignorant. This is the path that we Buddhists have inherited, which has been passed down from its inception up until today. Buddhism must be passed on through theoretical study, practice, and fruition. If we have only completed the first step, it would not be right to begin to teach, because we would not be able pass on the correct technique of practice. If we have only

studied and not yet practiced, we still do not know the truth or see clearly. If we use this theoretical knowledge to teach others, we will be half-blind and forced to guess, because we'll know only some aspects of the whole truth. It is like the proverb of a group of blind men describing an elephant while feeling only a part of the whole. Each man knows only the part of the body that he touches. The one who touches the side of the elephant claims that the elephant is like a wall. Another who touches the trunk asserts that it is like a snake. The third one touches its tail and claims that it is like a rope. The fourth one who touches its tusks describes an elephant as like a spear. Each is correct from their own perspective, but not entirely right either, which leads to useless arguments.

Those who only study the Dhamma but don't practice it will always debate the true nature of the teachings. Some will say that you can begin investigating with wisdom straight away without needing to develop concentration first. Others say that you must cultivate mindfulness before you can gain concentration. In some

cases it may appear that we can develop wisdom right away. In the time of the Buddha there were instances where people attained enlightenment while listening to a Dhamma talk. What most people don't know is that the listeners already had excellent concentration. Their minds were already in a state of calm, which is why the Buddha did not need to teach them how to become concentrated.

The Buddha was comparable to a modern-day teacher who can look at children and know what grade they're in. If they have completed primary school already, it is not necessary to teach them primary-level material, so the teacher may teach at a middle-school or high-school level. If a student has graduated from high school, the teacher may offer a university-level course. Before the Buddha expounded a discourse, he would first check the minds and character of his listeners. He had the special ability to know the mental capacity of each person, such as whether they had already developed virtue or concentration. If the listener did not already

possess a certain quality, then the Buddha would talk about that quality they lacked.

For instance, to the laypeople the Buddha would first teach generosity, because they were not yet charitable and open-handed. They still craved for wealth and thus had to be taught how to sacrifice, give up, and donate their possessions. For those without virtue, the Buddha would teach them to maintain the precepts. For those without concentration, he would teach them to develop concentration. For those who already had virtue and concentration, he would go straight to teaching about wisdom, talking about the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eight-Fold Path, and impermanence, suffering, and not-self. This is the correct way of teaching. It is just like a doctor who prescribes the right medicine for a sick patient. If the patient has stomach pain, the doctor will give medicine that cures stomach pain. If the patient has headaches, the doctor will give medicine that cures headaches. In this way, the treatment will quickly remedy the illness.

These are matters related to study and practice. In Buddhism, before spreading the Dhamma, we should study it thoroughly, understanding at least the Noble Eight-Fold Path. The essence of this religion is the Noble Eight-Fold Path and the Four Noble Truths. Every aspect of the Buddha's teaching comes out of the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha said that no matter how great and varied his teachings were, all of them had one taste, just like the sea has a single taste. The vast oceans have an incredible amount of water, but the taste of the water everywhere is salty. In the same manner, all the varied teachings of the Buddha have the same single flavour: the extinguishing of suffering and the methods to do so. The way to extinguish suffering is to follow the path (*magga*), which consists of the Four Noble Truths of suffering (*dukkha*), its cause, its cessation, and the path. Suffering and its cause are taught because they are found in the heart of every sentient being.

Our hearts all experience suffering and its cause of desire. Nowadays all of us are stressed and unhappy. Is there anyone who claims to live completely stress-free?

We are bound to face issues that continuously cause us agitation. If it's not one thing, then it's another. The cause of stress is actually our own desire, nothing else. The primary cause of unhappiness, our desire, displays itself in three main ways. The first is *kamma taṇhā*, craving for sensuality, taking interest in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. The second is *bhava-taṇhā*, craving for becoming or having. The third is *vibhava-taṇhā*, craving for not-becoming or not-having. Craving for sensuality is the desire for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations such as wanting to watch movies, listen to music, take holiday trips to various places, sleep with this or that person, drink, or to eat. This is called *kamma taṇhā*. Examine yourself to see if these desires are within your own mind. If they are there, then you can be sure that your unhappiness to a certain extent arises out of sensual craving. When you are staying alone, how do you feel? Are you happy, or are you sad and lonely? These feelings of sadness and loneliness arise out of desire: we long to have friends, and we want to stay close to exciting sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. But when we

stay in a secluded place without any fun sights, sounds, smells, or tastes, we feel lonely and miserable. This is unhappiness that arises out of our sensual desire.

The second cause of suffering is *bhava-taṇhā*, the craving to become or to have something. Is there anything we want? Do we want to be rich? Do we want a wife or husband? Do we want lots of money, or maybe an important, powerful position? Wanting any of these things is *bhava-taṇhā*, craving for becoming. If such desires remain with us, we will not be able to live with ease and comfort, or to remain equanimous. For example, if we want to become a Member of Parliament, we will have to seek support by going around lobbying and campaigning. If we want a certain government position, but are unable to appoint ourselves, we must run around campaigning, hoping the voters will select us for that position. If we were to stay equanimous, we fear that we would not be elected. But if we have no desire for positions of power, then we don't have to run around campaigning, wearing ourselves out. Living at ease is

more comfortable, but we cannot do so because of our desire to be this or be that.

The third type of desire is *vibhava-taṇhā*, the desire not to be a certain way or not to experience something. For example, we don't want to be poor, have a low-status job, be criticized, be arrested and put in jail, to be fired from our jobs, to get old, get sick, or to die. If we have desires such as these, they will cause mental stress and suffering. While working, we'll fear being laid off. Having a powerful position, we'll fear losing it. In this way we worry unnecessarily.

However, if our mind is neither pleased nor displeased with the circumstances we find ourselves in, and we are okay with whatever happens, then we will not be bothered or stressed. If we do not want to experience any suffering, then we should give up all of these desires. We ought to be able to live alone, without delighting in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. We should not desire to become or possess anything. Whatever happens is acceptable. If sickness

or death comes, we just go along with it. When it comes time to age, we just let the body age. When it's time for sickness and pain to come, we let them come; when it's time to die, we let the body die. We do this because we cannot control or prevent these things from happening. Attempting to prevent them only brings weariness and stress, because they are impossible to control.

The way to not be stressed about these matters is to give up our desires regarding them. Stopping desire is similar to stopping a car. A car can stop because it has brakes. If it didn't have brakes, the car would continue along, even though the driver might want to stop it. He might hit the brakes, but if they are not working, the car will not stop. Similarly, if we want to stop our various kinds of desires, but we do not have a good set of brakes, we would be able to stop them. Luckily, the Buddha gave us a set of brakes to stop our minds. This set of brakes is the path of practice (*magga*) laid out by the Buddha. The path is the tool that we can use to stop our desire. The Buddha presented the path in many different ways, but it always has a core essence. The

emphasis varied depending on the personal circumstances of the audience. To the monks and nuns, the Buddha would teach virtue, concentration, and wisdom. To further elaborate, he would describe the eight parts of the path. These include right view and right thought, which are aspects of wisdom. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are aspects of virtue. Finally, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration are aspect of concentration. So the whole path can be summarised as virtue, concentration, and wisdom. If the Buddha wanted to summarize the path, he would just talk about virtue, concentration, and wisdom. If he wanted to present it more in detail, he would describe the Noble Eight-Fold Path. When speaking to lay people, the Buddha would talk about generosity, virtue, and meditation, because the lay people still had a lot of money, which they were attached to and depended on as a means to seek happiness. So he had to teach them to stop seeking and using money so that they could maintain their virtue and practice meditation. This is also a valid way to talk about the path, breaking it down into generosity, virtue, and

meditation, which consists of both *samatha bhāvanā* and *vipassanā bhāvanā*. *Samatha bhāvanā* means to make the mind calm, allowing it to enter a state of concentration. *Vipassanā bhāvanā* means to see the truth clearly, which is accomplished with wisdom and seeing in terms of the Four Noble Truths. The mind must know impermanence, stress, and not-self; it must know these three characteristics of existence (*ti-lakkhaṇa*).

These are the brakes that we can use to stop all our various desires. If we can stop desire, then our minds will be free from all forms of unhappiness, because desire is the cause of mental stress. Desires are like disease-causing microbes in the body. What causes the body to become ill? It's the germs and viruses that cause a cold or flu. If medicine can kill the invaders, the illness will go away. The medicine in this case is the path. Therefore, we have to try to take this medicine, because right now our minds are not well. We have to take the medicine of Dhamma, which is the Noble Eight-Fold Path of virtue, concentration, and wisdom, or

expressed another way as generosity, virtue, and meditation. Which iteration of the path is most appropriate depends on our personal circumstances. If we still have money, we should use it all up so we don't have to earn or spend it anymore. We can then ordain. Because once we ordain, we don't need to use money; we can rely on alms food and the support of faithful donors.

If we don't have to use money, then we don't have to seek it either. We'll then have time to fully develop the path, to purify our virtue, and to cultivate mindfulness continuously. In order to be able make the mind concentrated, the mind must have mindfulness to restrain it from thinking about all kinds of matters, because thinking is what causes the mind to be restless. If mindfulness is always there to look after and control the mind, all the time, then peace and concentration will arise. With peace, the mind will experience a happiness and bliss that is above and beyond any worldly form of happiness. This is what will enable the mind to give up its various desires.

But having concentration does not automatically lead to the dissolution of desire. The concentration itself is still the target of desire, and that desire still has the opportunity to damage the mind's state of calm. For instance, if the mind comes out of concentration and begins to think about different things, desire can arise. If we don't use wisdom to counter it, we will end up following the dictates of our desire. However, if after coming out of concentration we use wisdom to teach the mind that the happiness we gain from those things we crave is minuscule, is accompanied by much unhappiness and stress, and is not comparable to the happiness obtained from concentration. By teaching the mind in this way, it will be possible to stop desire.

For instance, after coming out of concentration we may want watch TV, listen to music, or open the fridge to check for a drink or snack, so we have to teach the mind not to consume all these things, for they only offer superficial pleasure and temporary happiness that interferes with our effort to calm the mind. Suppressing

desire is better, for when we are able to do so, a much greater peace and happiness emerges.

This is how to use wisdom to pin down the various kinds of desire and fight against them. If there isn't peace, the mind will not have the strength to fight against its desires. When desire for anything arises, we will immediately go along with it. If we don't get what we want, we feel so bad that we even want to die. People who are addicted to drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol feel that giving up their drug of choice is extremely difficult if they don't have peace of mind. If we practice meditation and make the mind calm, then when craving arises for drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol we can reflect with wisdom, reminding ourselves that if we take any, we will have to consume it continuously without any end in sight. We'll be attached to it like a fish caught on a baited hook. If we do not take any though, we can stop, and we will not need to take the substance anymore. A mind that has peace will be able to give up its desires, because it already has inner happiness. When we stop desire,

happiness returns right away, but as soon as desire arises again happiness immediately disappears.

In this meditation practice, there needs to be generosity before there can be virtue. For there to be concentration, virtue needs to be safeguarded first. Before wisdom can be used to eliminate the defilements, there has to be concentration as a supporting factor. Before liberation is possible, we must have wisdom. This is the practice that has different stages, which we have to develop in progression, without skipping any steps. It is like when we were kids: before we could stand, we had to learn to crawl. Before we could learn to walk, we had to learn to stand. Before we could run, we had to master walking. We had to progress step by step.

The practice of Dhamma is just like that. If we meditate without studying the Dhamma first, we will be skipping an important step and our meditation will not give results, or if it does, they will not be the real thing. They'll be fake and might cause us to deludedly think

that we are already liberated, even though our hearts are still full of defilements. Therefore, we should be cautious, because otherwise we may end up going crazy. Meditators go crazy for precisely this reason: They don't study; they don't learn the proper method of meditation. After meditating, they will be deluded and believe their conclusions are correct, until in the end they go mad, unwilling to listen to or believe anyone else.

Therefore, when following the Buddhist path of meditation we need the guidance of a teacher or an Ajaan. If we don't have a good teacher, we should read books with the teachings of the Buddha or of the modern-day meditation masters. But even with these books, it is still possible for us to go wrong because we may misinterpret their meaning. Thus, we should be careful. If we are meditating without the guidance of a meditation master, we have to turn to the heart, taking that as our foundation and watching our mind to see whether or not it still has desire, greed, anger, or delusion; to see whether it is discontented at all. If it is, it

indicates that we still have not yet made any real progress.

Don't go thinking that you already understand everything and presume that you are liberated, because you might not have been in a situation that can really test whether or not the mind has any defilements left. Therefore, let us walk the path the Buddha travelled and encouraged us to follow. The path starts with *pariyatti*, or study. The second step is *paṭipadā*, to put into practice what we have learnt until we are liberated, which is next step, called fruition, or *pativedha*. Finally, after that we can use what we have known and seen for ourselves to teach others, in order to benefit them. On the contrary, if we only study without practising and then try to teach others, we might mislead them. So instead of benefitting, they are be harmed by our teachings. Therefore, don't rush to instruct others; try to teach yourself first so that you may see the truth yourself and be liberated from all stress and suffering. After that we can begin to teach others.

Questions & Answers

Tan Ajaan: If you have any good experiences, please share them with all of us. This can help confirm that the teachings of the Buddha are not void, but are useful and beneficial for those who practice them in every age and time period. They are to be known inwardly by each person. Dhamma wasn't only applicable during the Buddha's time period; it is a truth that is there all the time. Whoever meditates well in the correct way will definitely receive the results of their practice. If anyone has good experiences to relate, please share them with all of us. This will motivate us, bringing us happiness and delight, encouraging your friends in meditation to know this great Dhamma.

The Dhamma of the Buddha is hot and fresh, just like a brand new car that rolls out of the factory ready to go. It doesn't matter when it was released — this year, last year or whenever — it is still as hot and fresh as ever. Dhamma is known inwardly and is capable of benefiting all practitioners of all ages. It just depends on whether or

not the practitioner is able to implement it, has the conviction to practice, and has the four bases of success (*iddhipada*), which are aspiration (*chanda*), persistence (*virīya*), intentness (*citta*), and careful reflection (*vimarṣā*). These are very significant aspects of Dhamma, for without interest in meditating, without diligent effort in meditation, without a mind that focuses on it, and without reflecting on the practice of meditation, it will be difficult for any results to arise from the practice. Therefore, if we still do not have these four factors, we should try to give rise to them. To create interest in meditation (*chanda*), we must learn enough so that we want to attain the results.

It's the same as when we apply for a job: what we really want to know is how much the salary is. We are not interested in whether the job is heavy or light, difficult or easy. There's no need to ask about these matters; we only want to know the wage. Meditation practice following the Buddha's teaching is the same. We should know what result we will get from doing the practice. What will we be paid? If we know that we will get a

billion or a trillion dollars, our interest will instantly arise and we will be delighted, and we'll be willing to meditate immediately. We should try to study so that we'll know that the results we will receive from the practice are worth much more than all the money and property in the world. The richest person in the world is still not as wealthy as those who have reached *Nibbāna*. Think of it this way — if we know that we will be richer than the number one billionaire in the world, we will then have the willingness, interest, and desire to practice, and will work diligently to meditate by ourselves. It is just like when we know that after we finish a task we will receive a substantial reward: we will not lie around and be lazy. We will not go out and party. Instead, we will quickly finish up our work in order to receive the reward. Getting paid for our work is the most important part.

We have to study so we'll see the worth of the path and fruition of *Nibbāna*, to see that there is nothing more valuable than escaping from all suffering. Even the richest people of the world are still unable to free themselves from stress and suffering. Think about it.

Even with millions and billions of dollars, they can't use their money to extinguish the unhappiness within their hearts. They are still stressed by one thing or another, troubled with aging, sickness, and death, and worried about the loss of wealth, status, fame, and the sensual pleasure they gain from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Money, even with billions in bank, can't help. But those who have attained the path and fruition of *Nibbāna* will not be stressed by such things. They won't be bothered by the loss of their wealth, status, fame, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, or by the deterioration of the body as it ages, gets sick, and dies. Such things will not disturb the mind of those who have attained *Nibbāna*.

We think about things in this way so that we will be happy to meditate because no one wants to suffer; no one wants to return to this cycle of birth and death. Coming back each time we are afflicted with aging, sickness, and death. It is so much work to just reach maturity. We have to learn everything all over again, like how to crawl, stand, walk, eat, and speak. We must go

to school before we are mature enough to support and feed ourselves. This whole process is really strenuous and exhausting. Even when we are able to work to support and feed ourselves, this too is so demanding and tiring. It is only once in a while that we have the leisure time to do as we please, such as on the weekend when we can rest for a bit before we taking off again. We work hard for another five days and rarely have time to really do as we like.

Birth is not a good thing. To take birth is to seek suffering. It leads to roasting in blazing bonfires, not to happiness or great wealth. Those who are wise will not want to take birth, because once born, we have to age, get sick, and die; we have to deal with all sorts of things. We meditate until achieving *Nibbāna*, when we don't have to come back to cycle through death and rebirth anymore, and thus we escape old age, sickness, and death. We won't have to be bothered by all the issues of the world. So let's think like this constantly, and we will then see the value of the meditation practice and will be willing to do it, even though it may be difficult and

troublesome. We will be persistent in the practice despite the setbacks we face initially, and so with continuous practice we will see the results. Having experienced the results, even greater enthusiasm and effort will arise. This is similar to working: when we achieve our goal and we are rewarded substantially, we want to work even more.

Therefore, let's first build up our interest and satisfaction with the meditation practice, so we'll see that the worth we receive from meditating is so valuable, worth more than all the things in the world. Seeing this, we will be persistent and diligent in our meditation practice. Our mind will only think about meditation and not procrastinate by thinking about where to go and what to do for fun; there will only be the desire to meditate. No matter who invites us to go anywhere for fun, we decline; but if they invite us to go meditate or visit the temple, we go right away. If they invite us to go out to eat, drink, and have fun, we don't. This is called *citta*, a mind focused on meditation. *Vimāṃsā* is thinking about the subject of meditation, such as considering the

proper way to develop mindfulness (*sati*), concentration, and wisdom. Only think about virtue, concentration, and wisdom, about the Four Noble Truths, about impermanence, stress, and not-self. Thinking about these topics is called *Vimarṇsā*.

Once we have the four bases of success (*iddhipada*), results are sure to arise. Having achieved the results, we will rest at ease as if we have earned our monthly pay check. Our weariness will disappear entirely as a result of receiving our salary. A mind freed from stress is like a person who has escaped from under a massive boulder. There is only lightness and ease. In any place at any time, in whatever situation, we will not be worried or heavy-hearted anymore, but will only feel light-hearted and at ease, like we're floating weightless in space. These are the results that we receive from our meditation practice, from the enlightenment that comes from following the path all the way to *Nibbāna*.

It lies in our heart; we do not have to change anything externally. Externally, we're ordinary people like we've

always been. People outside don't know the state of our mind. Only we ourselves know, or perhaps fellow meditators also know, but certainly people who don't practice will not know. But this isn't important, because we don't meditate for the sake of telling others; we meditate for the sake of knowing for ourselves. We know that we are released from suffering and just this is enough. Whether other people know doesn't matter. Knowing will not enable them to also be released from stress. Except sometimes people discover that we are liberated, so they seek instruction to help them become liberated as well.

In this practice, we do not need to be rewarded by anyone. Our reward is just the results that arise within our own mind. There is no need for praise, recognition, or anything else from anyone, because the mind is already full and contented. The minds of enlightened meditators are fully satisfied all the time. This is similar to those who have already eaten a full meal: no matter how expensive or delicious the food is that is offered to them, they won't eat anymore because they are not

hungry at all; they're already full. Those meditators who have achieved *Nibbāna* will not be hungry for anything, but will live with eternal happiness and contentment. This is not the same as consuming a meal, which leaves us full only temporarily. After only two or three hours, hunger and craving arise again. But the mind that is full after realising *Nibbāna* will never be hungry again.

This is what we will get from the practice. If we think and study in this way continuously, desire to practice (*chanda*) will arise. This is followed by persistent effort (*viriya*), being intent on the practice (*citta*), and careful reflection (*vimāṁsā*). We will then proceed with our meditation practice with determination without looking back until attaining *Nibbāna*. Similarly, once a fire is burning it will consume wherever fuel there is until none is left. Only then will it be extinguished. Those who already have the four *iddhipada* or factors of success will practice until they are enlightened. If they have not yet achieved success, they will continue with the practice. The Buddha said that those with the four factors of success would gain enlightenment at most in

seven years. If they are capable and wise, it will take them less time, as little as seven days. If we didn't have Buddhism or a Buddha to teach us, no matter how long we practiced, even if it was seven hundred aeons, none of us could reach enlightenment, because we wouldn't have a guide to point the way. Without a teacher it would not be possible to meditate all the way to the final goal. But with a Buddha showing the way, it is possible to reach *Nibbana* in seven days or seven years. This is the wonder of Buddhism. If we are born and don't encounter Buddhism, we will not have the opportunity to be enlightened within seven days or seven years. Therefore, this is a golden opportunity that happens only once in a very long time.

To give an analogy, if a shop gave a steep discount of 90% off, we would need to rush to get there before they sold out. What used to be sold for a thousand baht would be sold for just a hundred. It is certain that the goods would sell out in just a few days, and definitely they would all be gone after a whole seven years. Similarly, meeting Buddhism is a golden opportunity, like

a shop that offers its goods at a very low price. In meditation, the price is only seven days or seven years. If we don't hurry to meditate, after we die and are reborn we may not encounter Buddhism again, and then however long we meditate, even if it's for seven eons, we will not be able to gain enlightenment. Therefore, we should quickly seize this opportunity to meditate, just like the Thai proverb that says we should scoop the water while the level is high, because when the water is gone, the opportunity will be lost.

A Refuge for the Mind

April 13, 2013

Today we have all come to the temple to build a refuge for our minds. As for our physical refuge, we already have enough as it is to provide happiness and pleasure on a daily basis. However, the happiness that we get from the body is not permanent, because the body itself is not permanent. A day will come when the body deteriorates and we will not be able to rely on it for our happiness and various pleasures. So we must rely on the mind as our refuge, because it is able to provide happiness without needing the body. We rely on the teachings of the Buddha; we rely on the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. With the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as the refuge for our mind, we will be happy and be able to extinguish all kinds of suffering. But if we have only a physical refuge, then when something happens to our body, when the body cannot provide us with pleasure, we will be depressed and agitated.

Therefore, it is appropriate that we seek both types of refuge: the physical one to take care of the body and the spiritual one to look after the mind. When the body cannot provide us with happiness anymore, we can then rely on the mind as our refuge to be happy. Or, we can choose not to seek happiness through the body at all, because mental happiness is worth so much more than that of the body. If we try to rely on the physical body alone, we will often be stressed and troubled because happiness found through the body is not continuous. Sometimes we are happy because we are able to get what we desire, but when we lose what we were able to get and what we loved we will suffer. Or when we are not able to get and do what we want then we also become upset.

This is how it is with physical happiness that depends on sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations that arise through the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and physical body. It is a happiness that goes up and down; sometimes it is there and sometimes not. However, the happiness that arises in the mind is something we can

make stay with us all the time, because it does not depend on the body or anything else. It just depends on the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha to teach us how to give rise to mental happiness.

Happiness found in the mind arises from practising the teachings taught by the Buddha and his noble disciples that they themselves have already practised. They constitute the correct method of training characterised by the Pali words *supatipanno*, *uju-patipanno*, *naya-patipanno*, and *samici-patipanno*. This is the correct way of practice that leads to *Nibbāna*. It is a practice for the sake of extinguishing stress, defilements, and craving. In order for us to practise correctly, we have to follow the practice taught by the Buddha, which is to develop the Noble Eight-Fold Path of virtue, concentration, and wisdom, or alternatively expressed as generosity, virtue, and meditation.

Through this practice we build an inner refuge for our heart. The external refuge, such as the Buddha image that we bow to, is not something we can rely on. It is

merely a symbolic representation of the Buddha and the life he lived. He renounced everything, giving up all the wealth and possessions of royal life. He left to ordain, to cultivate virtue and to meditate, developing both calm and insight. The Noble Disciples follow the Buddha by also giving up their wealth and possessions, maintaining virtue, and practising meditation in order to develop their minds until gaining the path and fruition leading to the various levels of enlightenment all the way to the highest level of *Nibbāna*. Once enlightened, they can use what they have realised to teach others, to teach the method that enables practitioners to reach *Nibbāna*, a permanent refuge. It is a permanent peace and happiness within the mind, which arises from the practice of the Noble Eight-Fold Path, from virtue, concentration, and wisdom, from generosity, virtue, and meditation.

A Buddha image is just a symbol to remind us to reflect on the way the Buddha lived his life. Similarly, the noble disciples whom we bow to are also exemplary models showing the correct method of practice that leads

straight to the path and fruition of *Nibbāna*. As exemplary models, they arouse faith, *chanda* (aspiration), *virīya* (diligent effort), *citta* (intentness) and *vimaṃsā* (reflection), so that we too can practise correctly.

The teachings we receive, whether from the Buddha or the Noble Disciples, teaches us to practise correctly and methodically. They encourage us to be generous, maintain virtue, and develop calm and insight meditation. If we are able to practise according to what has been taught, it will yield the results of *Nibbāna*, peace, happiness, and the elimination of all discontentment (*dukkha*). When we no longer experience any suffering or discontentment, it means that we have finally found our refuge.

But right now the Buddha image, the noble disciples, and the monks we respect who practise correctly, and the teachings that we listen to are all useful even though they are not yet a true refuge; they have not yet entered our hearts. They are still external to us and are not able

to extinguish whatever pain and uneasiness there is within our hearts. They are still unable to give the mind everlasting calm and happiness.

In order to be able to extinguish all mental pain and find a permanent, eternal happiness, we need to practise the correct method of meditation. We seek the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha for the sake of receiving the teachings and to inspire us to put forth diligent and continuous effort as we practise the Noble Eight-Fold Path of virtue, concentration, and wisdom, or of generosity, virtue, and meditation. Every time we hear the Dhamma it really motivates us, because there is someone pointing out the path. If we try to walk a trail without a map, we might go astray. When we're lost, we will be hesitant and uncertain. But if we open a map, we will immediately see, "Oh!" We're on the wrong path!" and so we can change to a new one. Then we walk straight ahead following the map and move closer and closer to our final destination. Seeing our progress motivates us to keep going.

In meditation practice, we need to listen to Dhamma talks and to meditation masters (*Kruba Ajaans*) from time to time, but that does not mean that we have to listen to Dhamma talks or stay close to a meditation teacher every day. Sometimes we need to go out to a secluded place and live alone. In the beginning we need to stay close to a meditation teacher to gain skill and knowledge, but once we have acquired that knowledge it may be necessary for us to go into solitude and stay alone, because we meditate for the sake of calm and need to test ourselves to see if we can attain the various levels of Dhamma. There are times we choose a peaceful place to stay in seclusion removed from all sorts of things to see if we can really be our own refuge or not.

When we stay with our meditation teacher, we rely on the *pāramī* (accumulated spiritual qualities) of our teacher, living in abundance and safety. But when we stay alone in the forests or mountains we will not have the *pāramī* of our meditation teacher to make everything secure and convenient. At times like that we will have to

rely on our own *pāramī*. That is, we'll have to rely on the correct method of practice and the Dhamma that we have learned. This is the way we determine whether we can depend on our mind as our refuge. If the mind is not bothered by anything, it means we can be our own refuge, as in the Pali phrase, "*Attāhi attano nātho*." If we no longer suffer, it means we have the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as our inner refuge. If we still rely on the external Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, we won't be sure whether we can really be our own refuge or not.

If we keep up with our practice, we will know that the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha lie inside the heart, not outside. In the beginning we may be attached to placing images of the Buddha or of the meditation masters in our cars or around our necks, but if we keep practising, our mind will receive the results of our practice, and Dhamma will arise within our heart. We will immediately know that Buddha necklaces are not a real refuge. Because when we are stressed, the Buddha image cannot extinguish our mental pain. But when we apply

the teachings of the Buddha and are able to resolve the problem and extinguish the pain in our heart, we will know that this is the real Dhamma that arises within.

The Buddha proclaimed that whoever sees the Dhamma sees the *Tathāgata* (Buddha). The one who sees the *Tathāgata* is one who sees the Dhamma. The Dhamma that the practitioner sees is the Four Noble Truths: suffering (*dukkha*), its cause, the end of suffering, and the Noble Eight-Fold Path leading to its end. Whenever suffering arises the path should be developed, with wisdom seeing that the suffering that we experience right now within our heart arises from desire and craving; this is the second of the Four Noble Truths. The first truth is the pain that arises within the heart. We have to use the fourth truth — the path, mindfulness, and wisdom — to find the cause of our mental discomfort. We will then see that the cause of suffering is our various kinds of desire. Whenever the desire for anything arises, our mind becomes agitated and restless to the point that we're unable to eat or sleep properly, and we will not be calm, still, or at ease. If we see that

this is caused by desire and we can stop it, then the suffering and stress will disappear. The cessation of suffering is the third Noble Truth.

Altogether, there are Four Noble Truths. The first Noble Truth is the truth of suffering (*dukkha*). The second is that suffering has a cause. The third is that suffering can be resolved. The fourth is that there is a method or path that will end our suffering. When suffering arises, we should use the path to investigate the situation the way a doctor would. When we have some physical problem, we do not feel well, and so we go to the doctor to find the cause. Why is that you aren't feeling well? If the doctor finds that some type of bacteria is causing the problem, he prescribes an appropriate antibiotic. Once the germs are wiped out, the disease goes away.

Similarly, when we are not feeling well mentally, we should go see a doctor, who in this case is the Noble Eight-Fold Path that uses mindfulness and wisdom to find the cause of the problem. We will know that the cause is one type of desire or another, wanting

something, trying to be something, or not wanting something to be a certain way. When these types of desires arise, the mind does not feel well. We develop the path by asking whether or not it is within our ability to prevent something from happening. For instance, is it possible to prevent our body from getting sick or experiencing pain? Can we prevent the body from dying? Can we prevent the body from aging? If we cannot prevent it, why do we want the body not to grow old, not to get sick, and not to die? For by wanting not to experience these things, we suffer pointlessly with no benefit at all. We cannot change the fact that aging, sickness, and death are there whether we like it or not. Seeing things in this way is the work of mindfulness and wisdom as they develop the Noble Eight-Fold Path.

Before mindfulness and wisdom can be effective, we need concentration. Before concentration can arise, we need virtue. Before virtue can be maintained, we should be generous and giving. These are steps in the Noble Eight-Fold Path. Before the Buddha could maintain virtue, he had to renounce his royal life and give away

all his wealth before he could leave and ordain. When he could give up his wealth completely he could maintain his virtue, because when we do not desire wealth it is not necessary to act unskillfully. People break the precepts and act unskillfully because they still crave wealth and want to get it easily so they do so in a way that hurts others. For instance, people who want money will rob a bank. But those who do not have the desire for money will not find it necessary to rob a bank. People like monks who do not use money will not be tempted to act unskillfully because they do not need to earn money to support themselves. We make merit to reduce our need of money, so that eventually we will not need to buy our happiness and will not be tempted to act unskillfully when making money becomes difficult.

If we cannot earn money in an honest and legitimate way, but we still desire to spend money, we might choose to obtain money through wrongful means. However, if we do not need money to buy various types of happiness, it won't be necessary to act in a dishonest way. When we have no money, we will not be perturbed

at all. Since we are already meditators, we don't need to be worried about seeking and spending money. Therefore, we can easily maintain our virtue, without creating any unskillful *kamma*. Because of that, our mind will be ready to meditate, will be able to become calm, and will have the time to develop mindfulness continuously.

In order to make the mind calm, we should have mindfulness and restrain the mind all the time, not allowing thoughts to proliferate. They will gradually be reduced step by step until we are able to stop them completely. Once we can do that, the mind will be able to become peaceful. With that, concentration (*samādhi*) arises. "Peace" means concentration.

But in an everyday worldly context, we often use the word concentration (*samādhi*) instead of 'mindfulness.' We often say, "Today I wasn't concentrated at work." Or, we claim, "I wasn't concentrated on studying." But really, it is mindfulness that we lack, not concentration, because our mind wasn't focused on the task or work at

hand. In fact, it is more appropriate to use the word 'mindfulness' instead of 'concentration,' because we have never experienced true concentration before. Therefore, we cannot call it concentration because that refers to a mind that has dropped into a peaceful state of oneness and has stopped all of its thinking and mental proliferations. If we enter deeply into this state, we will temporarily not be receptive to any visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations. If it is not a complete state of calm, we will still be receptive and be able to sense visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. However, the mind is not agitated by them and has no emotional response to the various visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensation that arise for us to know. The mind knows them, and then lets them go. The mind is neutral and can remain impassive. In this way, this state may be called concentration (*samādhī*).

Once we have concentration we can think logically in terms of cause and effect, because emotions of all sorts are eliminated, or at least weakened. Emotions are still

there, but the mind is able to use mindfulness and wisdom to eliminate or control them. Without concentration, emotions can be very strong. When anger arises, we might not be able to stop it. When greed and craving arise, we might not be able to stop them. But with concentration (*samādhi*), the craving that arises will not be strong, and we will be able to know that it is craving or it is anger. Then we can use wisdom to investigate, and we will be able to stop the craving or anger. For instance, when we desire something, we use wisdom to teach the mind that the things that we want will not give us real happiness and the pleasure they do offer is so fleeting and quickly followed by suffering. The things that we acquire have to change and deteriorate, and when that happens they will not be able to provide happiness. So instead of giving us happiness, these things give us stress. It's better to fight against the desire in the first place and not acquire them at all. Once we own something it becomes a burden and we must look after it and tend to worry about it. And then when it's gone, we get upset.

When we use wisdom to teach the mind, we will be able to give up desire and stop wanting this or that thing. If the mind wants something that is impossible, we can teach the mind that its desire is not realistic, such as when it wants to avoid sickness and death. When these things happen, we just have to live with them. Don't wish for the pain or sickness to go away, because wanting that will bring a mental pain that is much more severe than the physical one. This is how to use wisdom to eliminate all types of desire.

In order for wisdom to be effective, the mind should have peace and concentration to control our emotions or fight against them. For without concentration our emotions will be very strong. This is comparable to a patient undergoing surgery: if anaesthesia is not administered, surgery cannot be carried out because otherwise the patient would fight against the surgeon. But if the patient has received an anaesthetic, he will sleep impassively. When the operation is carried out he will not struggle against it. The surgeon will then be able to successfully complete the operation. This is the

same as in our meditation practice: if the mind is not still enough, we will not be able to contemplate with wisdom because our emotions will rebel against it. For when we direct our mind to examine subjects that our emotions and defilements (*kilesas*) don't like we will not be able to contemplate successfully. The subjects that our defilements dislike include aging, sickness, death, and disgusting things such as the various organs in our body. The defilements don't like seeing these things so they overlook them. Not seeing this aspect of ourselves, we become deluded and think that the body is attractive, lovely, and beautiful. We see it as something worth having, and we take it as our possession.

However, if we have concentration, we will be able to teach the mind to examine those aspects that are not beautiful, and those parts of the body underneath the skin, including all the various organs. When we see these things we will be able to reduce our love of and delight for the body, to eliminate sexual desire, and to be able to stay alone without feeling lonely. People who lack wisdom cannot do this, because whenever they see

beautiful things craving and sexual desire arise and they want these things to give them happiness and stay with them indefinitely. But when they have to be separated from these things they feel lonely and isolated. This is something we have to use wisdom to examine. If we do not have concentration, we will not be able to examine it at all or will only be able to do so momentarily before our emotions and desires related to those beautiful things replace our investigation. When that happens we will not see the truth. We will then have to seek the body of this or that person to be our partner, and once we stay together it will be a burden to keep the relationship going. We will have to be worried and concerned about each other's welfare. Then we will be sad and heart-broken when we are apart or when we argue and don't see things the same way. The happiness that we got from that person will completely disappear when we are troubled by that person we love.

If we examine with wisdom in this way, we can give up our desire to have a partner or spouse. Staying alone is more peaceful and comfortable, with no need to be

stressed by other people, or to be jealous of or worried about another person. Whatever we want to do we can go ahead and do it right away without checking in with anyone else. Wherever we want to go, we can go. We have complete freedom. But when we have a partner, we cannot just go wherever or do whatever whenever we want. Before going out we have to seek approval.

This is wisdom. If we use it to examine, we will be able to give up desires of all sorts that dwell within our heart, the first of which is craving for sensual pleasure, craving for visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. For instance, we want a boyfriend or a girlfriend, a wife or husband, or want to travel all over or visit various entertainment venues. We do these things merely out of the desire to experience visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, merely for the sake of consuming sensual pleasures. Going out to drink and eat is the same. If we don't drink and eat only what is necessary for the body, but do so out of craving, then this too is desire for sensual pleasure.

The second type of desire is wanting to have and to be, being dissatisfied with our current state and wanting to improve it. As an ordinary person, we may want to be the village mayor, sub district headman, member of the Provincial Council, parliamentary representative, a cabinet official, or prime minister. This is an example of wanting to have and to be. Or maybe we have a small amount of money and want more, or have a wife already but still want another one. Or we have a husband but still want two or three more. This is called desiring to have and to be. Once we have something, problems come along with it. We cannot remain contented, happy, and impassive, so we have to struggle and seek the things we think we need. If we want even more, then we may choose to create bad *kamma*, breaking the law and rules to obtain the things we want.

The third type of desire is wanting not to have or not to experience something. An example of this is desiring not to grow old, to get sick, or to die. This desire lies buried deeply within all of our hearts. When you think about old age, do you feel uneasy? When you get sick or have to

die, are you troubled? If you feel uneasy, it shows that you desire not to grow old, to get sick, or to die.

However, if we think about old age, sickness, and death and can still remain happy, it shows that we do not have desire, are content, and can accept it. When we grow old, we can still be happy. When we get sick, we can still be happy. Even as we die, we can still be happy. If we have peace, we will not fear growing old, getting sick, and dying, because this peace lies above the suffering of aging, sickness, and death. The pains of aging, sickness, and death cannot harm a mind that has this type of peace. Such a mind will have happiness all the time. For instance, when the Buddha entered *parinibbāna*, laying down the five *khandhas*, his mind did not waver or become agitated as he died. He was lying down peacefully without any sign of being in pain, because his mind was peaceful and happy all the time. He knew the highest type of happiness that is permanent, that is the result of developing the Noble Eight-Fold Path, of developing virtue, concentration, and wisdom, of developing generosity, virtue, and

meditation. This is the real refuge for the mind, on the level of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Those who practise correctly have peace and Dhamma as their refuge.

All of us can also have this true refuge by practising correctly, by being as generous as possible, pure in virtue, and meditating wholeheartedly. Once we can practise fully, the results will appear fully as well, because the cause and effect relationship has been like this since time immemorial. With causes, there will be results. With more causes, there will be greater results. With fewer causes, there will be fewer results.

Therefore, everything depends on causes and not on anyone else other than ourselves. It depends on *attāhi attano nātho*: oneself is one's own refuge. We are the one who has to do the practice; no one can do it for us. No one can practise virtue for us. No one can practise meditation for us. We have to be the ones to do it correctly, properly, and straightforwardly for the sake of extinguishing suffering, the defilements, and craving.

This is the way that will enable us to gain a refuge for our mind. Once our mind has a refuge, when the condition of the body deteriorates due to sickness or death, our mind will not be troubled at all, because we have a refuge and a happiness that is secure. We do not need to depend on a body to give us happiness; we don't need to rely on the body as our refuge. This is the reason why we come to the temple. We come to learn the methods that will transform our mind into its own refuge, to have the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha inside. Having learnt them, we should put them into practise. Having practised, the results will surely follow step by step.

With that, I would like to leave it to you all to take the teachings of the Buddha that tell us to practise correctly and to consider them and put them into practise in order to gain a refuge for the mind in the future.

Questions & Answers

Tan Ajaan: We think that it is like this or like that and so we go along with our thoughts. But it's rubbish. Really it is just the habitual tendency of the mind that is used to getting certain things in a certain way. So you should use mindfulness and wisdom to first calm down the mind to make it still, and then analyse the event in line with its causes and effects to find out what we have done before that led to the current situation.

Question: One time I became so frightened that I could not even recite a simple chant. I was confused, frightened, and didn't know what was happening. Yet it wouldn't be quite right to say I had no mindfulness either.

Tan Ajaan: Yes, you should try to train yourself to have greater mindfulness and peace of mind. Because there is a cause and effect relationship, you should cultivate mindfulness and practise meditation a lot. These are the most important aspects of the practice.

Do not believe in amulets or magic. They don't work, because if they did, they would be used all the time. We would just cast some spell on whoever we disliked, but it doesn't work that way.

It fools us because we're gullible and easily alarmed, just like the rabbit who believed the sky was falling down merely after hearing a piece of fruit hit the ground. The rabbit was sleeping under a palm tree when a palm fruit fell, and he thought that it was a landslide and that the end of the world was coming. Believing so, he started running away. When other animals saw him running and asked him what was wrong, the rabbit told them that the end of the world was coming. They were alarmed and believed what he said. They all ran along until they met the lion king who asked them what they were running away from. Once they told him, the lion king asked to be taken to that spot. The lion king was a *bodhisattva* empowered with mindfulness and wisdom and so was not easily swayed by the stories of the day. He would not believe what he heard until he had fully examined

things. So he went to investigate, to prove it for himself, compelling the rabbit to lead the way to the spot where the landslide occurred. Once there, he saw the palm fruit under the tree. “Oh! It’s here that the so called ‘landslide’ happened, right where a palm fruit fell.”

Therefore, there is no need to fear black magic or whatever else people believe in these days. No one can harm us except for our own confusion, our own panicked reactions. If we are not foolish or easily scared, there is nothing that can harm us. For matters concerning the mind, we should use mindfulness and wisdom to see things logically in term of causes and their effects. To be able to do that we need mindfulness and concentration.

Therefore, do not be alarmed or panicked by the things you hear. If we have mindfulness and wisdom, we will know that whatever happens does not change the fact that we will definitely have to die. So, we need not worry or be alarmed whether the world will be destroyed or not; we have to die just the same. We cannot escape

death, and anyway that which dies is not us. We should see that that which dies is merely a tool or a puppet. This body is similar to a puppet that we merely use as a tool to see images, to hear sounds, to smell odours, and to taste flavours. The mind is not the body. When the body passes away or when both the world and the body are destroyed in some explosion, the mind is not destroyed with the body. The mind is just like a person watching a movie. When the movie shows an explosion on the screen, the mind that watches it is not subject to the explosion. It just watches it impassively. The mind is the one who knows; it is conscious of and knows all sorts of things that arise in relation to the body. It matters not whether the body is developing or falling apart; it merely knows like the one who watches a movie.

Whatever arises in relation to the body or to the world in which the body resides does not impact the mind, the one who knows all the various matters. It is like the mind lives in another world, observes from another world, like people who watch a movie or watch TV. The events

displayed on the screen do not impact the viewer. However, if the person is watching it without mindfulness, he will be excited and alarmed by the images he sees. Sometimes, people who watch a very frightening movie close their eyes because they dare not look, even though seeing does not do anything to the person watching. They don't want to watch out of foolishness, a lack of mindfulness and wisdom, and because they believe in the illusion that they are the ones on the screen. They are too afraid to see what will happen to the person on the screen.

May we know the truth about this, so that we will not be worried about whatever happens. No matter how low we get in our life, we will be able to accept it. It is normal for things to improve and decline. The world both progresses and declines. Our lives too progress and then decline. We develop according to the various causes and conditions, or because of our past good deeds. When things decline, it may be due to the unskillful actions we have previously done. These are two things that we cannot change because they are

things that we have done already in the past. We just have to receive their results. That's the way it is.

Therefore, we don't have to be too worried when the bottom seems to fall out of our life. May we use patient endurance, equanimity, and Dhamma to accept the truth that this is the current situation of our life. It's the same as driving: sometimes we go up and sometimes we go down. When we go down, we go down and before long we go up again. We keep going up and down in this manner. If we do not wish to always go up and down, we don't have to come back and take birth. If we don't take birth again, then there will be no ups and downs in our life. There will only be peace and happiness all the time. This is the life of the Buddhas and all the Arahants. They have stopped traveling, stopped driving up hills and down valleys. They rest in their home, which is more comfortable, which we call *Nibbāna*. For they have no desire and so they do not need to go wandering.

All of us are still wandering on because we are driven by craving. We are not able to stay at home and be happy,

because if we did so we would become bored. So we have to go leave our home and encounter good and bad situations one after another. Therefore, don't blame anyone when our life falls apart. We can blame ourselves for not being able to remain equanimous, happy, and uninvolved. If we can train our mind to be calm, then subsequently we will be able to stay equanimous, without needing to go anywhere or get involved with anything.

Let us be firm and use mindfulness and wisdom to try to train the mind to accept the truth, to separate out what is real from what is not, to separate the mind from the body, to know that the mind and the body are two different things. We are the mind; we are the part that is permanent and never disappears. We are not the body, which is the part that is temporary, changes, deteriorates, and expires. If we accept the fact that the body has to grow old, get sick, and die, and at the same time know that we do not become old, sick, and die along with the body, then we will not be agitated or

worried. We will be able to live normally and happily regardless of what happens to the body.

This is the wisdom that we have to gradually teach the mind. We have to separate the mind from the body. To do this we must make the mind calm. When we sit in meditation, the mind will let go of the body temporarily. When the mind is calm, whatever happens to the body will not make the mind agitated or worried. When the body aches here and feels pain there, the mind remains indifferent. This is separation of mind and body by means of meditative concentration (*samādhi*). When we leave concentration, we have to use wisdom to teach ourselves to remember that the mind and body are two different things. The body has to grow old, get sick, and die, but the mind does not have to age, sicken, or die. The mind is just the one who knows and is responsible for taking care of the body in line with its need, but is not able to prevent the body from becoming old, sick, and dying. However, the mind does not get old, get sick, or die along with the body, so there is no need to be concerned or frightened because it will not bring any

benefit and will only bring unnecessary suffering and weariness. This is the truth that the Buddha awakened to and that all of us can also come to know provided that we practise and make the mind calm.

Question: Tan Ajaan, a dog bit my leg. What past *kamma* caused this?

Tan Ajaan: Well, you walked towards it and then it bit you. It's already happened, so you just have to treat it. If we do not live close to stray dogs, they won't have the opportunity to bite us. Once it happens, we just have to accept it as our *kamma*, for there is nothing that can be done about what has already happened, except for treating the wound. If it heals, it heals; otherwise we just have to live with it. Our mind wasn't bitten, you know, it was only the body that was bitten. Our mind doesn't have to be frightened, or tormented by it. We don't have the ability to heal the wound right away; that depends on the body. When it is time to heal, the wound disappears on its own. If that hasn't happened yet, we just live with

it. Sit and recite '*Buddho, Buddho*', chant, or pay respect to the Buddha image.

Let it go. If you can, let go, and it won't be a problem. Mental pain is much stronger than physical pain. Physical pain is just a fraction of mental pain. It is like when the doctor informs you that you will receive an injection, and then it hurts even before you get the shot. The mind feels pain before anything has happened! Therefore, train the mind to be equanimous, and it will not be agitated by the pain of the body. We cannot prevent physical pain or sickness; one day sooner or later the body has to experience pain and sickness in one way or another. Being bitten by a dog is one way we experience pain and sickness. Slipping and falling down while walking is another type of pain and sickness. Having a stomach ache and diarrhoea after eating bad food is yet another form of pain and sickness. These things have causes, and without the causes the results will not arise. If we live close to dogs, we may be bitten by one. If we eat food that has spoiled, it causes stomach pain and cramps.

Everything has a cause, and when the cause is there, so is the result. Once it happens, we just have to let it run its course by itself. If the painful condition does not go away, then we just have to live with it. Sooner or later, it will go away because nothing is permanent. Because when the body dies, whatever pains it has will all disappear. Whatever diseases there are will all disappear. Every type of disease will end. There is no need to take medicine. All we really need is some firewood to treat our diseases — we go to the crematorium and the body becomes ashes and bone fragments. This is the permanent way to treat physical pain. After this we will not have any more pain or sickness.

So we don't need to worry. Whatever illnesses we have will have to go away. Don't be afraid. If it still has not resolved itself, just live with it and after not too long it will disappear on its own. Let us look after the mind by preventing it from wanting. Without desire, there will be no suffering. Whenever desire arises, suffering also arises. Even when the physical ailment goes away, we

will still suffer because of the desire for it not to happen again. Even when the body is healthy, we are still tormented by the fear that the disease may come back. So do not be afraid, but just live with it. This is how the body is. We have to understand that its nature is that it has to grow old, get sick, and die. No one can escape this. It doesn't matter if we are a beggar or a millionaire; we are all subject to the same law. However, those who don't mind if the body gets old, gets sick, and dies will not be agitated or suffer because of the natural processes of aging, illness, and death.

Therefore, our responsibility is to stop our desire that wants the body not to get old, to get sick, or to die. If we can do so, we will be able to live comfortably, without mental suffering. It's just this that we need to be able to do. We solve all the problems right here in the mind. The mind is ours; it is us, so we resolve the issue in the self. We cannot resolve it in the body, which is like trying to correct other people, making people to be this or that way. It doesn't work. If someone drinks alcohol and we don't want them to drink, we cannot make them stop.

They have to stop on their own, if that's what they chose to do. Therefore, we cannot cause the body not to age, sicken, or die, but we can make the mind unaffected by aging, sickness, and death. So why don't we do this? It is beneficial to work on those areas that we can affect rather than working on the areas that cannot be changed. Even if we could live for a long time, free of aging, illness, and death, desire would still arise. We would want to age, get ill, and die because after living so long we would end up bored. What if we could live a thousand years? After that we may want to die. So there really is no end to desire.

The Buddha said that even the vast ocean has its boundaries and limitations, but desire is truly limitless. However much desire gets, it is still not enough. Having gotten one thing already, it wants another. It's picky and fussy all the time and never contented. If we don't control it and make the mind calm, we will not be able to stop desire. We have to train the mind to be calm, to develop mindfulness, and to control our thoughts. If we can control and stop our thinking, the mind can then be

calm, and our desire will calm down. Subsequently, we won't want anything because we already have happiness and contentment. From then on, we will always try to safeguard this peace. If we can maintain it, we will be able to stop desire.

What we really have to do is to make the mind calm. We should cultivate mindfulness to control our thoughts, bringing them to stillness. By stopping our thoughts, we will be able to stop desire. Use wisdom to see that acting out our desires is endless. When we act on our desire once, we will have to keep doing it again and again. If we can stop our desire and not act on it, we will not have to do it anymore. For instance, if we don't act according to our craving to smoke cigarettes, then eventually we will not want to smoke anymore. However, when desire arises and we follow its command, then even after just one cigarette, we will again be hankering for another. Desire can go on like this until the day we die. If we crave a cigarette and do not give in to our desire to smoke, then this desire will disappear on its own, because when we want a

cigarette but don't smoke one, in the end we will forget why we wanted one in the first place. This is the way to solve the problem. We solve it with mindfulness, with concentration, and with wisdom. May you put this into practice.

Question: Why do people say that it is better to practise as a human rather than as a deva? Is that true?

Tan Ajaan: Devas are like wealthy people who because they are already happy have become lazy. But for the most part we humans experience suffering and thus want to find an end to it, so we search and meditate much more. Just like the Buddha: although he was a prince, he still suffered. But people who are not like the Buddha will not renounce the world in order to ordain, because they are attached to this happiness. The Buddha had accumulated tremendous amounts of *pāramī* (the spiritual perfections), and was able to discern suffering even amidst the pleasures of a king. He knew that after living a while, he would eventually have to die and suffer, because aging, sickness, and

death are steadily closing in. But as a *deva*, there is no aging. In most cases when they die, they just go ‘poof’ and disappear. Generally they enjoy heavenly sights, sounds, smells, and tastes and live with great joy. Devas are comparable to millionaires and billionaires who indulge in happiness. So they generally do not meditate, except for those with great merit and who have previously developed a strong interest in Dhamma, those who enjoy listening to the Buddha and the *Arahants*. Such people will be able to meditate and attain enlightenment. For instance, the Buddha’s mother was a deva who became a stream-enterer, because the Buddha went to teach her. Without instruction she probably would not have been interested. She would probably find joy in the pleasures of heavenly sights, sounds, smells, and tastes, because in that state no suffering disrupts the mind.

Right now, we come to the temple because we are discontented. For example, people who are diagnosed with cancer want to come to the temple to meditate because they are starting to see suffering. They realize

if they want to put an end to it, they have to practise Dhamma. So people who experience great happiness will be less likely to seek the Dhamma than those who suffer a lot.

Question: Although it's more difficult as a *deva*, it is possible to achieve enlightenment both as a deva and as a human, right?

Tan Ajaan: For *devas* to realise enlightenment they must be able to communicate with someone who is able to teach them. For instance, devas came to listen to Ajaan Mun's Dhamma talks. But without someone to teach them, they will not be able to attain enlightenment.

Question: So it's harder to achieve enlightenment as a *deva*, then?

Tan Ajaan: It is harder than as a human, but really humans are the same. Even though humans have access to teachers, if they are not interested in them, it is like there aren't any teachers at all. Heaven is a

comfortable and joyous realm, so the *devas* are not keen to practise. Meanwhile, those dwelling in hellish realms suffer immensely and do not have the mindfulness or merit to find a way out. They are like prisoners who are not in the best place to practise Dhamma. As for the millionaires, they are only interested in travelling around for fun. Instead of staying in the temple to meditate for four or five days over the holidays, they choose to fly to Hong Kong. But if we're out of money, we may choose to go to the temple.

There has to be suffering to motivate us, just like the suffering that drives a sick person to find a cure. Why would a healthy person go to the hospital? Doesn't one have to be sick before going to see a doctor? People need a reason to go to the temple; they need to experience one form of suffering or another. We might suffer because we lose a loved one or because we lack the funds to go out for fun. Then not knowing what to do next, we end up at the temple. Few people really come to the temple with the faith and desire to sincerely practise meditation. But there are such people and if

they come to practise, they will really do it. Once they come, they will not leave and back out.

Once those who have faith and strong commitment to reaching *Nibbāna* start, they will not retreat. But those who go to the temple because of suffering will want to come out once their suffering is gone. Because their minds are at ease they forget the pain that caused them to run to the temple, and they want to go back looking for more. There are people who ordain and disrobe, ordain and disrobe, over and over again. The Buddha taught us not to be complacent, not to be heedless. Right now we are living happily and comfortably, so we should think about the future when we will have to grow old, get sick, and die. Thinking in this way will spur us to practise Dhamma so that we can accept whatever undesirable circumstances we find ourselves in. If we have not considered these matters, when we are confronted with something challenging, we will not be able to accept it. By then it is too late, just like students who don't do their homework and never crack open their books. When it's time to take the test, they fail. But if the

students consistently study and do their homework, when it's time to take the test, they pass easily. The test for us, according to the Buddha, is to go through old age, sickness, death, losing what we love, and experiencing what we do not like. This is what we should try to contemplate consistently. We should imagine what we'll do when we are old. If we end up getting sick, what will we do? We will have to die, lose those we love, and face that which we would rather not experience.

Think in this way, and we will have found a way to teach our mind and to prepare ourselves to accept all sorts of events. No one likes being old. No one likes being ill. No one likes dying. Nobody likes being separated from their loved ones. No one wants to meet up with something they dislike. But we live in a world where nothing is permanent or certain. We are sure to experience some of these events. If we don't prepare ourselves beforehand, then when we meet up with them, we will not be able to accept it. We will not be able to calm our mind, make our mind neutral and peaceful, and not be

able to end its turmoil or agitation. But if we have prepared ourselves and our minds consistently, when we meet up with these things, we will not be troubled at all.

This is like the Buddha who encountered things he didn't like when he left the palace to go sight-seeing. He saw old people for the first time, because in the palace his father forbade old, sick, and dead people to be seen by his son out of fear that seeing such a sight would make his son renounce everyday life. After seeing such things his mind would definitely want to find a way to resolve these existential problems. When the king was not around the prince escaped the palace, and while he was travelling about he discovered the truth when he saw an old person, a diseased person, a corpse, and a monk. Together these are called the four divine messengers. They encouraged the Buddha to leave his royal life and ordain, to practise meditation and to Awaken as a Buddha.

All of us are the same as the Buddha. If we want to achieve enlightenment, let us consider these four divine messengers constantly. Think about aging, sickness, death, and renunciation, and we will have the conviction and courage to go forth and practise seriously. Because there is no other way to free us from the pain of aging, sickness, and death, except for by ordaining and practising earnestly.

If we do not ordain, then we must sincerely practise as if we had. If we practise inconsistently, just doing it now and then, the results will not be consistent, because the defilements and craving are working all the time. Our opponent is working against us all the time, but if we work only once in a while, how are we going to compete? Therefore, we should work all the time, fighting against craving and the defilements. Every single waking minute, we need to control our desire, to eliminate and extinguish it, to be able to win. If we only do it now and then, if we only practise during the Songkran holiday that happens once a year and for the rest of the year we let our enemy trample on us, then

there is no way we will be able to fight and win. The method that will spur us to fight is to constantly recollect the four divine messengers. The Buddha taught us to always reflect:

I am of the nature to age. I have not gone beyond aging.
I am of the nature to sicken. I have not gone beyond sickness.

I am of the nature to die. I have not gone beyond dying.
All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become otherwise, will become separated from me. It cannot be avoided.

If we think about this constantly, then why would we still want to get involved with these mundane things? Sooner or later we will lose everything that we have. Are we ready to lose it yet? If we are ready, we do not even need to meditate. If we are prepared to age, prepared to get sick, prepared to die, and prepared to lose what we love, it means that we are already enlightened. Those who are enlightened are the only ones who are prepared to accept the various truths that we encounter.

If we are not ready yet, then our mind is still not calm. It is still unstable and discontented. We have to keep on practising to make our mind calm and still, so that it can let go. If we can let go and experience peace, then subsequently whatever happens will not be an issue.

Let us develop the contemplation of these four divine messengers of old people, sick people, dead people, and religious people. Being a monk or nun is the best possible life; it is the best reward in our life. Nothing is better than ordaining, because it allows us to break free from the cycle of rebirth and achieve enlightenment. Had the Buddha not ordained, he would not have become a Buddha. Had the Noble Disciples not ordained, they would not have become Noble Disciples. Few indeed are those who become Noble Disciples as lay people. They are special cases who already possess fully mature spiritual qualities, or there are certain factors that prevent them from ordaining. Even though they cannot ordain, they are able to practise in the manner of monks and nuns and to achieve enlightenment just the same. Just like the father of the

Buddha who never ordained: he relied on the skill and ability of the Buddha to expound the Dhamma to him for seven days before he died. The Buddha, a Noble Disciple, or an *Arahant* must teach someone for them to become enlightened without first ordaining. Additionally, there must be circumstances that force them to meditate, such as being close to death. At that moment, whether we have the capacity to practise or not depends on the spiritual qualities and merit of each individual. If we have not developed our spiritual qualities, even if an *Arahant* sits beside our bed and teaches us enlightenment, it is still not possible. If we cannot make our minds calm and let go, then even if an *Arahant* comes to teach us, enlightenment would still be unattainable. There are two parts that we need: One comes from ourselves and the other from the teacher. For without a teacher, we will not know the way to let go and be empty. On our side, if we cannot make our mind calm and concentrated, we will not be able to let go.

So right now, if we cannot ordain, we should try to make our mind calm and peaceful to attain concentration, so

that when we approach death, we may depend on the teachings of the meditation masters to help us let go. Sometimes, we may achieve enlightenment in our dying moments because at that point we have no other way out. If we do not let go, we will suffer a lot. But if we can let go, then there will be ease and comfort, and the suffering will go away.

This is our duty and true work that brings real wealth. The different levels of enlightenment are ours to take with us. As for our money, possessions, loved ones, degrees and positions, we cannot take them along with us. When we die, whatever rank, position, or noble titles we have obtained will be displayed in front of our coffins, but we cannot take these with us. But we can take along *Nibbāna* and the various levels of attainment such as stream-enterer, once-returner, and non-returner.

So let us walk the path of the Buddha and Dhamma; let's not travel the path of the world. The path of the world is fake, deceitful, and doesn't go anywhere, but just circles around the same old place. After death, we

just return back to square one, trapped in this endless cycle of rebirth. Death is followed by a new birth, and once again we have to go through aging, sickness, and death. We cycle through in this manner, again and again. If we go the way of Dhamma, though, we will not come back, but will go on to *Nibbāna*, to everlasting happiness.

If you come on a regular weekday, there'll be fewer people. But on holidays or weekends, there'll be a lot of people. Nowadays, we cannot talk one-on-one because there isn't enough space or enough time. That's why we have to talk here (in the *Chuladham Sālā*).

Questions & Answers

Question: Nowadays, a lot of laypeople come, don't they?

Tan Ajaan: Well, there are more and more.

Question: What about on regular weekdays?

Tan Ajaan: Some days it's the same with a lot of people. But on weekends and public holidays there are generally more people than on regular weekdays. On weekdays it depends on the circumstances. Some days a lot of people come, but there is still less than on weekends and big holidays. Some days, there is no one at all, or maybe only one person comes.

Question: So I need to watch to see when there is a good time and come again because I don't feel comfortable with so many people around.

Tan Ajaan: Oh it's okay, we are all friends on a journey together. Our problems are all similar. We all have desire, wanting things to be this way or that way, wanting to get this or that. When we don't get what we want, we become frustrated and irritated. We are all that way, unable to make the mind still and calm. If we can make the mind still and calm, then we won't have any more problems. The problem is that the mind isn't still, because if it was still, it will be satisfied and contented.

When it is not, it is hungry, desire arises, and no matter how much it gets, it never has enough. We always want more and more, with no end. So following the whims of desire is not the way to stop desire. Instead, we should make the mind calm and stop following the dictates of desire. We have to do both. First, we stop and calm down the mind, because without doing this we won't be able to stop being a slave to desire. If the mind is already peaceful, then when desire arises, we can choose not to act on it, because happiness is already found within this peacefulness.

Question: We have to resist, don't we?

Tan Ajaan: We don't need to resist it if we already have peacefulness. It is just that when desire arises we need to remind ourselves not to act on it, because if we do, we will suffer. We already enjoy peace and happiness, but this peace and happiness cannot stop desire permanently; it can only do so temporarily. For once we come out of this peaceful state, desire will come up again. But if we use wisdom to teach ourselves,

thinking, “Hey! Don’t go acting according to desire. Once we do that, there’s no end to it. Instead of becoming happier, we’ll end up even more unhappy.” Once we know just this much, we can stop desire and thereby return to our original peaceful state. In doing this we need to have peace as our foundation. It is like we are running a business: if we are already earning a profit, we do not need to worry too much. Even if there are additional opportunities to increase our income, if the risks are too great, it’s not worth it. Since we are already making a profit, it is enough just to maintain it. When we have concentration (*samādhī*), it’s like we are already earning a profit. We are already happy, so there is no need to further increase this happiness, because really there is nothing that is more peaceful and happier than this.

This is something that we must teach our mind because it does not yet know. Even when it is calm, it still fantasizes that it would be good to get this or that. But really it’s not good at all, so we have to use wisdom, which is the special knowledge that the Buddha

acquired by himself. Prior to the arising of the Buddha, the religious ascetics of the time already had deep concentration (*jhāna*) and peacefulness, but it still wasn't enough. When they came out of concentration, they still wanted to get this and that. It was only the Buddha who knew that, "Oh! Wanting to get more and more does not make us happier and happier; actually it just increases our suffering." He saw that desire is the cause of mental stress and discomfort. When our mind is at peace and yet still gives rise to desire, we are able to use wisdom to stop it. With wisdom we can stop it permanently, because we know that desire is harmful, so we do not follow its whims. Once we stop acting as a slave to desire, we will not be driven by it anymore. The desire will dissolve and disappear, and we will live comfortably. Nothing will come to agitate us or to push us to chase after one thing or another.

Question: Sometimes desire is reduced, but doubts arise again. There's doubt about all sorts of issues regarding Dhamma.

Tan Ajaan: Well, there are things we do not need to know, for they are imponderable. What we should know is the Four Noble Truths, and this will be enough. We know: this is stress or suffering (*dukkha*); this is the cause of stress; we know this is the way to extinguish stress; this is the cessation of stress. Just know this much. Just these four things.

Question: Then when we have doubt, we should just be mindful and cut it off. We don't have to doubt anything, right Tan Ajaan?

Tan Ajaan: If it's not about the Four Noble Truths, then do not worry about it, don't waste your time. For instance, why would we want to know when the world was created? Will that information enable us to resolve the problem of our unhappy heart? It cannot. Why be curious about other people? To wonder whether or not someone is an *Arahant*, or what level he's attained, has nothing to do with us. Can he make us an *Arahant* too? All we need to know is whether the person has come to trick or deceive us. If he pretends to have some

attainment, we have to prove it and look into it. If we remain equanimous, we do not need to get involved with him. Whatever he claims to be, we just let him be. When we are not deceived by him, and he cannot use us or take advantage of us, then we really don't need to know at all. It's better for us to know things that truly matter, to know about the suffering in our heart, to know whether right now is the heart troubled or not? If there's suffering, where does it come from? How can it be resolved so the suffering will go away? It is enough to know just this.

Practitioners have to go inside and look within. All meditation masters tell us to go within. If the mind goes outside, it's defilement. If it goes within, it's the path. Enter the heart and only observe it, knowing whether the mind is now happy or unhappy. If the mind is unhappy, we should know how to cure it. The method to eliminate unhappiness is to find its cause. From where does it arise? We rely on the teachings of the Buddha that tell us it is caused by desire. So we ask ourselves, "Right now what do we want?" Once we know what it is that we

desire, we teach our mind not to want it. Wanting something does not lead to happiness; the suffering it causes outweighs the happiness. When the mind is instructed in this way and comes to accept this truth, we will then be able to stop desire.

Question: So we teach the mind bit by bit, and when it becomes contented and full, it will withdraw from suffering and the cause of suffering all on its own?

Tan Ajaan: Well, when suffering is extinguished, there will be no more problems. We won't want to go get involved in all those things. For instance, wanting our partner to be a certain way gives rise to discontentment. Can we change them? Can we order them around? We cannot. If we make a request, sometimes they may go along with our wish. But if we can stop ourselves from wanting them to act according to our wishes, then we will not become agitated. However they are is not our concern, so we will not be bothered by them. We must let go of everything; let everything go according to its *kamma*. Don't wish for people to be a certain way or do

certain things, because we cannot always get what we want. Sometimes we can, and sometimes we cannot. When they don't respond, we feel hurt, regretful, and angry. But instead, if we are able to let go, we will feel at ease all the time. Even if they hop on one foot or walk around on all fours, they are free to make their own decisions. Whether they choose to use their head or feet to walk, it's their issue. Whether or not they drink alcohol is not our concern. If they get involved with this or that person, let it be their issue. What right do we have to forbid them? We have to let go. Having let go, we will not suffer.

Question: Sometimes I just can't let go. I try to track down the cause, but I can't sort through all of the thoughts to find it. I don't let go, because I can't see the real cause of suffering.

Tan Ajaan: Even if we do see it, we will still be unable to do anything about it, because it is their issue, not ours. The cause is just their own defilements. Their own desire makes them act that way. They are still unable to

stop their desire, so how could we stop it? If we could control people's craving, then we could order all the drug addicts in the country to stop their desire and solve the whole problem. But it doesn't work that way. We can only teach them to stop by themselves, to see the harm of their desire, and to use concentration to assist them in giving up their desire. That is all we can do. If they can do this, they will be able to overcome their addiction to drugs.

So do not go about fixing other people when we cannot even fix ourselves. Why resolve other people's problems? First, let's be able to resolve our own problems. Similarly, the Buddha was able to cure himself before he went about helping others resolve their problems. This is not selfish. Don't think that helping yourself and resolving your own issues is selfish. We have to solve our own problems before we can go about helping others solve theirs. If we are unable to solve our own problems, then how could we help others?

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If the Buddha had not become enlightened, how could he have taught others to become enlightened? Do you see? Before students can become instructors they must graduate first. Once they've graduated, they can become an instructor and teach others. Ultimately, we have to come back to ourselves and address the suffering in our hearts. We stop the cause of suffering, our craving, by practising virtue, concentration, and wisdom, or charity, virtue, and meditation. If we can practise these, we will be able to stop desire. Once we can stop desire, we can also stop suffering. Once we eliminate our own suffering, we can then teach others.

But we cannot resolve their problems for them; we can only teach them to do it themselves. For if we have taught them but they do not follow our advice, then there is nothing we can do. We are not them. They have to be the ones to solve it themselves, since the problem lies in their mind. We cannot go into their mind. If they cannot resolve it, we have to let it go. We shouldn't want them to be able to solve their problems, because then when they can't solve them we will become disheartened,

which is also not right. The Buddha was never disheartened or suffered because of his disciples. He remained unaffected whether or not they could resolve their problems, because it was not his responsibility. So let us take responsibility for solving our own problems. Don't be interested in other people, for it is exhausting and a waste of time. We mostly do not like to solve our own problems, but instead like to solve other people's problems.

The Four Requisites of the Mind

April 14, 2013

Today we have gathered to make merit because merit is an important cause of our happiness and personal growth. Once we make merit, our mind will be happy and we will develop. We stay with the mind, or you could say that we and the mind are one. It is the mind who creates us, for we arise out of mental proliferation. But in truth, we are the mind, that which knows, that which is still deluded, who still does not know itself. We still do not know who we truly are.

When we obtain a body we fall for the delusion that the body is us and belongs to us. So we end up taking care of the body more than we care for the mind. We fill ourselves with physical happiness to the point that we overdo it. Our physical happiness changes into suffering and shortens our life. We put too much effort into taking care of the body, which is not an important part of us. We have to know what's appropriate regarding the physical body. We should know how much the body

really needs. It is like maintaining a car: we do so with moderation. For example, we only add enough gasoline to fill the tank completely. Anything more would cause the tank to overflow and would not benefit us at all. The more important thing to pay attention to is the driver of the car. If he is not well taken care of, he will lack the energy to drive safely. In the same way that people drive cars, we drive our body, telling it to do various things. It is the mind that will experience the happiness or suffering that is caused by its own intentional actions. The mind should know what the various causes are that lead to its own happiness and unhappiness, and try to increase the causes that bring happiness and abandon the causes that bring suffering.

In order for the mind to live happily and to be free of suffering, we should know that the body is a temporary thing; it is just a tool of the mind. Not having a body is not a problem for the mind at all. The mind can still exist without a body. Therefore, we should not waste too much time and effort taking care of the body at the expense of developing our own mind. Nowadays, we

spend too much time on the body until there isn't any time left to look after the mind. The things that can make our mind cool, clear, and happy, and free us from all the various types suffering are generosity, maintaining our virtue, concentration (*samādhī*), and wisdom. These are the four requisites of the mind. They are the fortune, status, fame, and happiness of the mind. However, we mostly devote all our time to seeking physical fortune, status, fame, and happiness. We always want to seek more and more money, and ever higher social status, desiring praise, respect, and honour. We want to derive pleasure from the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, but seeking happiness in this way yields only a false type of happiness that does not really fulfil the mind or make it satisfied. We are merely amused and entertained as long as the experience lasts, but once it is gone, it is as if we have never experienced it at all.

Therefore, do not be obsessed with seeking happiness by means of the body, seeking fortune, status, fame, and pleasure with the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, because this type of happiness is short-lived and

ultimately has to end when the body is no longer able to support us. The time when the body is old, sick, or dying is very trying and painful time for the mind, because the mind is unable to seek happiness through the body, and has no idea how to find happiness without a healthy body.

The way we can be happy without relying on a body is to be generous, to maintain our virtue, and to meditate. That's why the Buddha taught us to always be generous, to carefully maintain our virtue, to diligently meditate to make the mind peaceful, and to develop wisdom, teaching the mind to know the truth of both mind and body, and to know the true causes of happiness and unhappiness. Once we understand the truth, we will be able to manage our experience of happiness and unhappiness correctly. We can then give rise to happiness and eliminate unhappiness. When we can create only happiness and no unhappiness, and all suffering has been removed, then our mind will only experience happiness all the time.

This is the path walked by the Buddha who shared what he found to all of us who are still ignorant of the truth. We should therefore have faith and conviction in the Buddha's teaching, and practice as much as possible to the best of our ability. The more we practise, the greater and faster the results will be. If we just practise a little, we will receive fewer and slower results, so slow in fact that we may not even see the fruits of our effort in this lifetime. Our life span is limited like a candle that burns through the night. If we do not quickly take care of business, the candle may burn out, leaving us blinded in the dark, unable to do anything at all. Our bodies are similar to burning candlesticks that gradually burn down until they are completely gone.

For this reason, while the body is still capable of making merit, maintaining virtue, and practising meditation, may we really do it and go all out. As for taking care of the physical body, we should just do what is really necessary. For instance, we should provide the body with sufficient food, clothing, housing, and medicine. Once we have enough of these four requisites, we may

stop seeking them and turn to mental happiness and developing the mind. More and more, may we be generous, be virtuous, and meditate. We can be more and more mindful, sit in meditation more frequently, and increase our wisdom. In this way our happiness will increase, and our unhappiness will decrease until it is ultimately gone. With no more suffering at all, the mind will forever be happy and blissful. A mind that is inherently happy no longer needs to seek happiness using the body. It need not come back to a new birth or take another body. The mind can live happily without needing a body as its means of acquiring happiness. This is similar to people who have adequate stores readily available in their home to meet all their needs, so they don't have to go out for anything. Not leaving their house, there is then no need to buy a car to take them around. In the same way, once our mind has attained enlightenment, it is like we have reached our home that overflows with joy and happiness of all types. There is then no longer any need to go seeking happiness outside our home. Without needing to seek happiness outside our home, there is no need to have a body.

Those who still have to take birth and enter a new body are people whose minds still lack complete happiness and contentedness. We still lack various things, and we want to get them, and because of our desire we will need a body. For instance, if they want to see, we need eyes, and if we want to listen, we need ears, so possessing a body becomes necessary. Once we obtain a body, we will have to take on all the associated suffering. Because the body must be supported by the four requisites, we must struggle to obtain them. Additionally, we need to safeguard the body against various mishaps, so instead of gaining happiness we end up increasing our suffering, because it is a burden to maintain the body. When the body gradually grows old and gets sick, it further intensifies our unhappiness. When the situation deteriorates to the point that we must leave the body and die, the suffering is multiplied many times over.

Therefore, let us all clearly see the harm of coming back to birth, and the harm of hunger and desire within the

mind. Let us realise that the harm of this desire and discontentedness comes because we do not care for the mind to make it full and contented. May we understand that we have put too little effort into giving, being virtuous, and meditating. This is similar to a person who is weak and emaciated: He knows that this is because he has gotten too little food, water, and sleep, leaving him shrivelled and feeble. Therefore, the mind that has never felt fully satisfied must seek sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects to nourish and entertain itself continually, because it has not been properly fed to cure its hunger. This is because the mind has not been generous, virtuous, or meditated, so it is our duty to be generous, to maintain our virtue, and to meditate.

This is the work that is more important than sustaining the body with the four requisites. But we still need to maintain the body for the sake of undertaking these activities, though we only need to do what is really necessary, as if we were maintaining a car. We do what is necessary to keep it running, but we don't waste our

time doing more than that, because we have other work to do. So we add gas, add water, inflate the tires, and repair it when it breaks down. That is all we need to do, because if we only look after our car and don't attend to our other duties, we will not have the money to maintain the car or do anything to bring us happiness. In the same way we take care of our body so that we can develop the mind. Let us only do what is necessary to support the body so that we may be generous and make merit at the temple, maintain our virtue, and develop meditation. Doing just that much will be enough.

That is how the Buddha practised. He was careful to maintain both his body and his mind, but he only gave the body what was really necessary. For example, with regards to food, he went for alms and ate only once a day. For shelter, any place that could protect him from the sun and rain was sufficient, like under a tree, in a hut, or in a cave. For clothing, three robes was enough to protect the body from the cold and insect bites. Medicine consisted of whatever was readily available, such as natural herbs.

If the body can continue to live, then we live. If it can't, we have to let it go to its death. But the point at which the body ceases to function is a critical time when we must take care of the mind and to be able to make it fully contented and gratified. For whenever the mind becomes completely satisfied, there will no longer be any need for the mind to endlessly cycle through birth and death, or to find a new body. Otherwise, if we take a new body, we will again be burdened with taking care of the body and again suffer the pains of old age, sickness, and death.

Therefore, if we want to be free from pain and unhappiness, we simply don't take birth again. When there is birth, there is also suffering and unhappiness. To be free from further births, we should make our mind fully contented and satisfied, empty of the desire for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects, free from the desire to be or become something, and the desire not to be something. The way that we may eradicate these desires is by using meditation. Before

we can do that, we should be able to maintain our virtue. Before we can maintain our virtue, we should be able to give up everything, or at least be able to practise generosity. If we want to maintain our virtue continuously, at all times, then we should give up all our wealth and possessions. There will then be no need to get involved accumulating and managing wealth, because as a monk or nun there is no need to work for our daily needs. Without the need to work, there is no need for unwholesome actions.

We act unwholesomely because we still have to earn a living, because we want to get money quickly and easily. Some people will even go to the extent of killing animals because it is an easy livelihood that earns money quickly. But it is an occupation that creates unwholesome kamma. There are some fraudulent merchants who cheat their way to excessive profits. Others swindle their customer by making all sorts of promises but not keeping their word. These are the causes that prevent us from maintaining our virtue; there is greed to get lots of money in a fast and easy way. On

the other hand, if it is not necessary for us to make a living and we do not have this desire for quick and easy wealth, there is no reason to make bad kamma. We can leave everything and ordain, closing the door that leads to unwholesome actions. As a monk, we do not need money because we are already provided for with the four requisites. We do not need to cheat others or take the life of sentient beings to obtain the four requisites needed by the body. This is the highest level of giving.

There are many levels of giving. In the beginning, we give a little here and there, such as making merit on our birthday, on New Year's, or on public holidays. As we study more Dhamma we realise the importance of giving, because it is one of the steps leading towards purity of virtue, practising meditation, the path and fruition of *Nibbāna*, and right through to the complete end of this *saṃsāric* existence. We will then be delighted to sacrifice more and more of our money, to make more merit, because we know that accumulating and enjoying more possessions is not the way that leads away from all types of unhappiness, nor will it end this

saṃsāric existence; it only leads us back to birth and death in an endless cycle. Those who see the harm of seeking possessions and deriving their happiness from them will either stop or gradually reduce their reliance on physical things until they do not need to chase after or use possessions. They can then ordain. To get to that point, they may also need to practice maintaining their virtue and meditating. Even though we might not be able to always keep perfect virtue or be completely calm in meditation, we will at least be able to experience some of the results that come from maintaining virtue and meditating so we will appreciate the value of a pure and peaceful mind.

When we realise we are able to make our mind peaceful and derive great happiness from that, we will gradually be able to reduce our use of money and our reliance on it to purchase various types of happiness. Because we do not spend too much money, we don't have to earn too much either, so we will have more time to maintain our virtue and practice meditation. In the beginning we might stay in the temple once a week, such as on the

lunar observance day; later on we might stay for three days a week, and increasing from that to 15 days out of a month. There is no need to work the whole month, so during one part we work and then we use the other part being generous, maintaining our virtue, and practising meditation. By doing this more and more, we will experience more and more of the positive results that come from the practice. We'll find that we are more content and happy. Our craving for all kinds of things weakens, giving us the energy and motivation to give ourselves fully to the practice.

We do this by giving up our livelihood, by no longer earning or spending money, and living like a monk. If we cannot ordain, perhaps because we are women, we can still live like a monk or nun would. It doesn't matter whether or not we shave our head; we can still live with completely pure virtue and devote ourselves fully to the meditation, spending the whole day doing nothing but cultivating mindfulness, sitting in meditation, and developing wisdom. When it is really necessary, we do some chores, such as keeping our living space clean

and tidy, preparing food for the body, washing our clothes, and taking care of our physical needs so that we may continue to practice until we reach the end of our journey, which is *Nibbāna*.

This is the correct way of living. We should live our lives following the footsteps of the Buddha, because it will lead us to a real happiness that is free of suffering, a state that never deteriorates or ends. It is a happiness that does not require us to return to this endless cycle of birth and death. This is a way of life that the Buddha practised and shared with us when he taught the Dhamma. Many people with faith in his teachings have already put it into practice and have reached the end of the path in the same way as the Buddha. The destination is called *Nibbāna*. Many people have reached this point, becoming *Arahants*, since the time of the Buddha all the way up until today. It will continue like this as long as Buddhism is still around to show the way. However, sooner or later, the day will come when this too shall pass away following the law of impermanence.

The Buddha predicted that Buddhism would only last about 5,000 years because after that people would fail to understand the importance of practising according to his teachings. At that point people won't be interested in meditating. They will only be interested in pursuing fortune, status, fame, and pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and physical body. We're only half-way through the predicted 5,000 years and we can see that for the most part people do not see the importance of going to the temple, giving, maintain virtue, or meditating. Few are those who are truly interested in applying the teachings of the Buddha. Although people still practise, they do so half-heartedly. Mostly, they come to the temple just to give, but don't yet want to develop virtue or to stay and meditate while keeping the eight precepts, because they are still addicted to the pleasure they find through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body.

To be able to meditate, we have to give up the pleasure obtained through the senses. Instead of keeping the five precepts, we should keep the eight, because otherwise

the mind will not have the strength to control itself and to become calm. We must keep the eight precepts for the same reason that we must use a low gear to drive up a steep incline. We cannot use a high gear, like fourth or fifth, when driving up the mountain; we have to shift to a lower gear. If we are in 5th, we downshift to 4th. If the 4th gear still doesn't provide enough power we move to 3rd, or even to 2nd according to the steepness of the incline.

Therefore, if we try to meditate with just the five precepts, we won't have the power to stop whatever desires or distractions arise in the mind. So we have to take the eight precepts, for this will help reduce the strength of desire, which gives rise to distractions, such as dreaming about having sex with this or that person. By following the eight precepts, we can cut off that desire, because we know that right now we will not go sleep with them. When we know that we won't go along with our desire, it will not arise. It is the same with overeating: When we follow the eight precepts, we don't eat after noon, so after that we don't have to run around looking for food in the evening or before we go to sleep.

In the afternoon or evening when we practice meditation, we won't feel drowsy or doze off. If we are full after a good meal, we will not be able to sit in meditation; we'll doze off instead.

In addition, we have to cut off our desire for various types of entertainment, such as watching movies, TV, singing, dancing, traveling, going out, dressing up, or using cosmetics and perfume. These kinds of happiness are fake and trivial. They do not last and soon fade away. They pale in comparison to the refined happiness obtained by meditating and calming the mind. If we spend our time watching TV or movies, seeing plays, listening to music, or dancing, we will not have the time to sit in meditation. But if we do not watch movies, go to the theatre, or seek fun at various venues, we will have the time to sit in meditation, to make the mind calm and peaceful. We will have the time to develop mindfulness and control our thinking by mentally repeating '*Buddho*', '*Buddho*', by chanting, or by observing our physical postures and movements all the times. We can use whatever method works for us, whether that is '*Buddho*',

chanting, or mindfulness immersed in the body. Whenever we are free from duties, we can sit down, close our eyes, and mentally repeat '*Buddho*', chant, or observe our breathing. After not too long our mind will enter a state of calm. We will experience a bliss and happiness that is far greater than the happiness we get from going out and having fun at various places, from watching movies or TV, or from singing and dancing.

These are the eight precepts we should keep. If we want to gain results, to easily calm our mind in meditation, we have to rely on the eight precepts to support our practice. In addition to not watching movies or listening to music, another of the precepts is to not sleep on a big bed with a thick mattress. The reason for this is that if our bed is very comfortable, we will sleep longer than necessary. Normally the body only needs to sleep four or five hours and can then get up, but with a thick mattress we might not want to get up and will continue to sleep for another three or four hours. This wastes valuable meditation time that is lost to sleeping on a thick mattress. The pleasure we get is fleeting, and once

we get up it's all gone anyway. This is not comparable to meditation. If we're skilled at meditation, we can maintain our calm and peace all the time. Whenever we want to calm the mind, we can.

These are the eight precepts that we should keep, whether at the temple or at home, whenever we seek to develop ourselves. Once we can maintain the eight precepts, the next step is to stay at a temple or any place where no one will disturb us. Even if we stay in a temple with many people, when it is time we will still rest separately in our own lodging. This individual privacy will enable us to control our own thinking, because if we all live together we will chit-chat and won't be able to control our thinking. If we stay alone, though, we can continuously repeat the mantra '*Buddho*', or chant within our mind, or be mindful of our physical postures and movements. Or, if we wish, we can count 1, 2, 3..... That is perfectly okay too as long as we can stop thinking about all our various issues. If we dislike repeating '*Buddho*', chanting, or observing the body, we

can count 1, 2, 3 continuously so that we stop thinking about anything at all.

Whenever we have spare time, we can sit down, close our eyes, and start counting mentally. Before long, our mind will enter a state of calm, which will be accompanied by a feeling of happiness and contentment. The hunger we felt from not eating anything after midday because we follow the eight precepts will fade away. Even without dinner, we won't be agitated as long as our mind is calm. Even if we forgo movies and TV, it doesn't matter, because we have this inner happiness instead. It is a happiness that is more exalted and refined than what we get from eating food, watching movies or TV, or from singing or dancing. If we wish to maintain this state of calm after we come out of concentration (*samādhī*), we should guard and watch the mind to find out why it becomes agitated. Through our investigation, we will notice that the cause of our agitation is desire, for when desire arises the mind loses its stillness and is unable to remain in equanimity. It becomes restless and worried. If

we see that in order to return to that peaceful state we have to give up our desire, then we should tell our mind to stop wanting, because otherwise we won't experience peace at all.

Therefore, stopping our desire is far better, so that we may continue to enjoy mental stillness and peace. Otherwise by following the inclinations of desire, the peaceful state will disappear. The happiness that we derive from desire is fleeting, and moreover, it will return and we'll have to go along with it. The more we follow the inclinations of desire, the stronger it becomes, until there is no peace left in our heart. This is what happens if we let our mind do what it wants after it comes out of a state of concentration. So it is better to control our thinking after our mind withdraws from concentration. Do not let thoughts be driven by desire. If we notice that our mind is thinking and acting under the influence of desire, we should teach ourselves to understand that following desire will only bring us suffering, not happiness. This is because our desire knows no bounds. No matter how

much we get, we'll still be dissatisfied and will continue to want more and more.

This is the method that we can use to stop wanting, so that we may maintain peace of mind. If we educate the mind and it believes us, if it agrees to give up desire, then we will be happy, because we will maintain the happiness that comes from a calm and concentrated mind. However, if our mind is still stubborn and hasn't accepted our instruction, we have to return to sit in meditation again whenever desire arises. If desire urges us to go out for fun, to watch TV, or to see a movie, then we have to sit in meditation again to recover a state of concentration. When the mind is peaceful again, the craving to go out for fun or to watch a movie will disappear temporarily. Once we come out of concentration, we have to control our thinking and prevent it from being influenced by desire. If the mind wants to go out to have fun, and we are unable to restrain it, then we need to use wisdom to teach it that it is pursuing the path to suffering, not the path to

happiness. If the mind still refuses to accept the truth of our instruction, we have to return to sitting meditation.

We continue in this manner indefinitely until the mind finally surrenders and is convinced. From then on, the mind will be done with wanting to seek pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and physical body. Without desire, we do not need to do anything at all. Staying uninvolved equanimously, nothing will come disturb the mind and harm the peace that comes from making the mind still. From then on, the mind will be peaceful all the time, because we are able to stop and completely remove all kinds of desire that dwell within the heart. This is *Nibbāna*. It lies right here. It lies in stopping all kinds of desire. Without desire, the mind will not be troubled or worried anymore; it will be free of pain and hunger. There is no longer any need to be born again because the mind already has a complete and perfect happiness within.

The mind is where *Nibbāna* is. *Nibbāna* is not a place; it is a state of mind devoid of craving, one that has

changed into the highest bliss or happiness. This is the development of mind that contributes to real happiness and prosperity in our life. We develop it by giving, maintaining virtue, meditating, and awakening to *Nibbāna*, which the Buddha and all the enlightened disciples have achieved in their practice. This practice of meditation is not something that is beyond our human ability. Otherwise, the Buddha would not have wasted his time teaching and no enlightened disciples would have arisen. But in fact, a great number of enlightened disciples have appeared, because they gained faith after hearing the Dhamma and put it into practice. They became intelligent; they saw the danger of being stuck with desire and attachment to the pleasures of the body, of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling tactile sensations.

We too can see the dangers of this type of happiness, because we realise that we will have to cycle through the endless round of rebirth with its birth, old age, sickness, and death. When we see the great suffering and dangers that accompany physical pleasures, we will

want to stop. It is like those who see the harm in drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or taking drugs, and because they can see the drawbacks they can quit. At first, the addicts need strong determination and endurance to fight against their desire. If they have a technique to calm their mind and rest in concentration, then it will not be too difficult. Otherwise, without concentration they probably will not be successful, because it is just too agonizing. If the tormenting desire arises and we can enter concentration, then it is like having medicine to relieve our headache so we may continue to live it comfort.

After we have successfully stopped our desire and yet mental torment arises again, if we have concentration, our mind will have the strength to fight against the pain. If by chance it can't handle the pain, it can always return to concentration and the suffering will cease. However, once the mind comes out of concentration, it may again experience some suffering. But if concentration and wisdom are there to support the mind, it will be able to

stop all the various types of desire or at least able to fight against them.

Therefore, may we all put lots of effort into giving, maintaining virtue, and meditating, because this is the one true way that leads us to real happiness, that frees us from all suffering, and that liberates us from the cycle of rebirth. There is no other way. If there was, the Buddha will have explained it. The Buddha has pointed out this one true way, so let us try to practice what he taught with perseverance until the end of our life. It is guaranteed that sooner or later, one day, the fruit of supreme excellence that the Buddha and his enlightened disciples attained will be ours for sure.

Audience: Sadhu!

Questions & Answers

Tan Ajaan: How are you?

Member: I'm doing fine, Ajaan. How are you?

Tan Ajaan: I am still comfortable enough to keep on breathing. Breathing, I am comfortable, but if I couldn't breathe it would be even more comfortable. Really, that's how it is. This body is a burden that we have to lug around like a mountain. Without a body, we are far more comfortable. We can actually sleep forever, without needing to wake up. Not needing a body is more comfortable.

Question: Out of compassion for your students, may Tan Ajaan live a long time.

Tan Ajaan: I will have compassion as long as this body allows. When the body breaks down I won't be able to do anything about it. I can't control it. May the students also have compassion for the teacher. May they take what is taught to heart and put it into practice. When the students don't practice, the teacher feels weary. Sometimes whatever is taught goes in one ear and right out the other. Even though they come back days or months later, they still haven't changed at all. When this

happens the teacher gets discouraged. The students are stuck in 1st grade and refuse to move on to 2nd or 3rd. They don't want to graduate college at all. Oh, be considerate of the person teaching as well! It's not just for the teacher to have loving kindness. Really, the student should have loving kindness for the teacher as well. If the students complete their studies, then "Oh!" It will really encourage the teacher to live a long time because then he sees the results coming from his teaching.

There really is nothing like seeing people free themselves from suffering. Seeing people cry is so sad; wouldn't it be better to see them laughing? Wouldn't it be better to see them happy? Truly, once we attain to the Dhamma, we can laugh even when we are sick and dying because Dhamma teaches us to know that the body is not us or ours. The body is but a house on fire, a mountain that weighs down the heart. Every day we feel burdened and heavy-hearted because of the issues related to the body, making a living, and maintaining our body so that it can live free from illness. All these things

revolve around the body. If there were no body, we would be light-hearted. Or to get the same result while there is a body, we do not attach to it or believe it to be ourselves. May you have compassion for your teacher and go practice. Then you can come back and tell me, “Now I’m so happy! I’m no longer bothered by my body at all. If something happens to it, even if it dies, I can accept it. It’s not a problem at all.” If that happens, out of compassion I will live a long time.

Audience (in unison): *Sadhu!* Ajaan, may your body and mind be healthy and strong.

Questioner 1: Lately, I have felt tense in meditation. It might be because I am focusing too much, which gives rise to headaches and tension.

Tan Ajaan: That is one possible cause. If we are over-zealous, desiring immediate results, it can cause tension and frustration. When we practise, we don’t expect it to give results. We just do the practice as something we have to do. If we are repeating ‘*Buddho*’, we just stay

with that, whether the results arise or not is their business. Another possible cause is that the mind may dislike meditating and because it is forced to do something it doesn't like, it causes these various symptoms in the body. If it does something it likes, the mind is light and easy. But as soon as it must do something it doesn't like, the mind becomes uncomfortable.

Questioner 1: Recently, I've had some doubt about whether I should contemplate or not. I don't know if it is because recently I've wondered, "Hey! Should I contemplate now?"

Tan Ajaan: Right, that is also another possible cause; when we practise, don't go start worrying. In the beginning, we need to study so that we are absolutely clear on what we need to do first, second, and third. What we really should do before anything else is to be able to develop mindfulness so that it can control our thoughts and stay with a single object. Wisdom is something that comes after that. Especially when sitting

in meditation — that is not the right time to contemplate with wisdom. Rather, we should stay with one mental object; stay with the mantra '*Buddho*'; stay with our chanting; or stay mindful of the in and out breath. We don't have to do anything else. Wisdom is something we do after we have withdrawn from concentration.

Concentration comes before wisdom. Unless we are particularly inclined to think along the path of wisdom and our mind is not able to stay with '*Buddho*', then when we sit in meditation we can use wisdom to lull the mind into calm. If the mind is not peaceful, because it's dwelling on a certain issue, then we have to use wisdom to work out the problem, so we can contemplate it in order to resolve it. If we are able to solve the problem, then the mind can enter a state of calm. But if we do not have any problems when we sit to meditate, then there is no need to use wisdom. We just maintain mindfulness of the in and out breath, or of the repetition of '*Buddho*', without contemplating with wisdom. In order for our contemplation to yield real results, we first have to make the mind calm. If we try to investigate without a calm

mind, the defilements will come interfere and resist our efforts. After contemplating for just a bit, the mind will start thinking about other things instead. However, if the mind is calm, the defilements will not have enough strength to resist or interfere as we investigate with wisdom. Then our contemplation will be reasonable, results will arise, and we will clearly see the truth.

So, wisdom is something that comes after concentration. If our mind is not calm yet, we should first try to make it peaceful. It is like a surgeon: before he can operate on his patients, he has to use anaesthesia to make them peaceful. Without anaesthesia, the patients would struggle and the surgeon could not operate. When the patients are unconscious they will not struggle, and the surgeon can successfully carry out the operation. Therefore, our mind should be calm before we try to teach it. Otherwise, defilements will interfere, dragging our mind to think about other issues. For example, when we try to direct our mind to contemplate death, the mind will refuse to do so because it is not calm. The moment it thinks about death

unpleasant feelings arise because it doesn't want to think about it. If our mind is calm, though, then there won't be any unpleasant feelings when we reflect on old age, sickness, and death. We will then be able to contemplate for a long time. When we have contemplated extensively like this, then we will not forget the truth; we will not think that we will not grow old, get sick, or die. This is wisdom.

Investigating with wisdom teaches the mind the truth, allowing it to sink deeply into the heart. For that to happen, we have to investigate frequently, in the same way we learned our multiplication table or memorized the alphabet. Before we could recite them by heart, we had to go over them again and again until it was embedded in the heart. Therefore, we have to regularly contemplate old age, sickness, death, the pain of separation from our loved ones, and the suffering of losing our possessions, so that it becomes embedded in the mind. Then we won't be sad when something happens because our regular contemplation has prepared us well. It is like knowing in advance how

much we will have to pay for our phone, electricity, or water bill, and so we are prepared. But if we don't think about it in advance, then when the bill arrives we will be taken by surprise. "Ek! I have to pay this bill?! And that one too?!"

So we train our mind to be well-prepared for anything that might come up. Once the mind knows what to expect, it will be well-prepared and be able to accept things when they happen. The mind won't be startled, excited, or bothered. This is wisdom. To think in this manner the mind has to be calm, otherwise the defilements will mislead us, encouraging us to think that we don't want to get old, get sick, or die, that we want to be young and beautiful forever, always free from sickness and death. If we think in this way, then when old age comes, we will be startled, such as when our hair turns white, our skin wrinkles, or something else unexpected and undesirable occurs. We're only surprised because we thought those things would never happen to us. We should teach ourselves now that these things will surely happen, because once we take

birth, we will definitely grow old, get sick, and die. No matter what, we will surely be separated from our loved ones. It's really just a question of when it happens. When we know this beforehand, we can remain equanimous and be free from worry and stress. If we do not know in advance and are not ready, then when something happens, we will immediately be worried.

We might be renting a place to live and the landlord does not mention that we'll be required to pay certain additional costs, so when we actually receive the bill, we are shocked. "Hey! When I first came you didn't tell me about any additional costs!" For this reason, we should carefully inquire before we move in, "So what are the various bills and expenses I will be responsible for?" so that we are mentally and financially prepared. In the same way, once we are born we should ask, "What will happen now that we are born?" We should know that old age, sickness, and death will have to come along, so that we can be fully prepared.

Do we frequently contemplate our impending old age, illness, and death? Just as the Buddha taught, we should reflect on this all day long. We continue reflecting until it's enough and we no longer forget. Instead, if we only think about it once or twice a day, we will easily forget about it when we are occupied with other tasks. If while contemplating old age, sickness, and death we feel uneasy, it shows that we have already forgotten all about it. To be able to think in this way, the mind needs to be calm and free of responsibilities requiring it to think about other things. If we are working, we will be occupied with the thoughts about work, and so we will not have the time to reflect on old age, sickness, and death, and we will forget after a while.

Our mind is prone to forgetfulness. Things arise and then pass away, so if we do not think about them, we will soon forget. Can we even remember what we ate for breakfast this morning? If we do not recollect often, we will forget, because new matters will distract us. If we don't want other matters to obscure the truth from our mind, we have to think about it all the time. To be able to

do this, we have to be calm and have no other work to do. For example, we must ordain or live a life like a monk. A monk doesn't work and has nothing else to think about, so he is free to reflect on old age, sickness, death, separation from our loved ones, loss and decline. We consider these topics frequently so that we will not forget and become deluded. When we don't forget, we don't become deluded. All of us are forgetful and deluded, thinking that we will live a long time, with no old age, sickness, or death. So when these things actually happen, we are shocked, to the point that we lose our appetite and can't sleep well.

When a doctor diagnoses us with cancer, giving us just three to six months to live, will we still be able to laugh? If we have trained our mind continuously, then when the doctor tells us the prognosis, we can say, "I already knew that I would have to die." The doctor only confirms what we already know. At that point, we will be ready to sincerely prepare ourselves. Before that we weren't, because we still did not know how true it really was. But now we must accept it and be able to let go of the body.

If we have concentration and wisdom, then we can definitely let it go. We have to practice concentration and wisdom to give rise to them, but it is not something we've ever done before. Perhaps we have just practiced a little, but that isn't enough. We have to do it as a full-time professional, as a full-time meditator. If we do it as an amateur, it will not be possible to defeat the defilements.

Having said that, we still have to start off as amateurs. Let us do it whenever we have free time, such as on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays. Instead of using the time to go out seeking false happiness, it is better to meditate, to take the eight precepts. If we are not able to come to the temple, we can turn our home into a temple by putting up a sign that says this is a temple. We take the eight precepts and meditate without TV or other entertainment on our day of rest. If we do not do so, we will not be able to progress. We have to train ourselves step by step, starting from what we can do, increasing from doing a little to doing a lot. Right

now, we just start where we are; we do what we can, and look to improve on it.

For instance, if we can currently maintain the five precepts, we consider taking the eight. We may take the eight precepts on religious observance days, or on holidays when we don't need to work. Or we can treat any day that we don't have to work as our observance day. On that day, we try taking the eight precepts, try turning off the TV, not wearing makeup, not using perfume, not watching movies, singing, dancing, or going out for fun. We just stay at home doing walking and sitting meditation. We do it step by step, because we can't do it all at once. We can't just drop everything and ordain right away. If we did, we would only torment ourselves, because we have never done that before. However, if we have continuously practised, then when we ordain it will be easy to meditate as a professional. Those who are professionals have previously been amateurs. It is only after practising continuously that they see their abilities develop to the level that they feel

confident enough to take it up professionally. If we don't start doing it, our practice will not progress.

So let's all start. Let's start keeping the eight precepts. If we can't, then we can keep the five precepts instead. Those who still cannot do that can be generous and practice that first. Don't worry about possessions and wealth. Don't use wealth to buy happiness and seek pleasure, for it will only obstruct the path to virtue and slow the progress of our meditation, because if we use money to seek pleasure, we will also have to continuously earn money. We will then be unable to maintain the precepts. So instead of using money to seek pleasure, we can give it to charity, which actually buys us true happiness. Making merit in this way buys us happiness of heart. It will enable us to maintain our virtue, and it won't be necessary to earn too much money. As we experience greater and greater inner happiness, our craving to experience pleasure from eating, shopping, and spending money will decrease. We will then have more money to give away. Once we have made more merit, our mind will become more

peaceful, more able to maintain our virtue, and more skilled in meditation. This is how these practices mutually support each other, step by step.

Questioner 2: The last time I was here, I took a picture of Tan Ajaan. May I offer it to you.

Tan Ajaan: Anumodana (I rejoice in your generosity). You know, though, if I want to see myself, I can just look in the mirror.

Questioner 2: When my meditation is going well I'm aware of the 'one who knows', but when I get involved in work such as washing the dishes, I lose that awareness.

Tan Ajaan: It is alright; you don't have to be too concerned about it. Just pay attention to the work at hand.

Questioner 2: So I should just continue to observe the body as I wash the dishes?

Tan Ajaan: Yes, we simply pay attention to the work at hand. As for other matters, we don't have to be concerned, unless it requires our involvement. If someone comes to talk to us, we just listen and examine whether it deserves a reply, or how we should respond. If it is not proper to speak, then we don't have to reply. We just continue with what we are doing. We hear, and just leave it at that. We know; it's just that we don't respond emotionally to what we know. Emotions disturb the mind. When we know anything, the mind becomes uneasy. If we know and remain equanimous, that is good. If we know and emotion arises in response, then that is not good. The reason we meditate is because we do not want our mind to react emotionally to whatever might come up.

Questioner 2: I am already used to following the breath, but I am not used to observing the body. Should I be trying to observe the body?

Tan Ajaan: Observation of the body can be done in two ways. The first way is to **observe the body in order to**

develop mindfulness, so that the mind does not drift about thinking about all kinds of things. This is called observing the body in order to develop mindfulness. Another way is to **observe the body in order to give rise to wisdom**. We consider that soon our body will have to decline, become old, get sick and die. We consider the aspects of the body that are not beautiful, such as the various organs covered by the skin. We consider them, both in ourselves and in others, especially in those people who arouse our desire.

If we want to cut off sexual desire for those people, we have to focus on the disgusting parts of their bodies. If we have clearly seen the loathsomeness of their bodies, then in the future we will not want to be near them; we won't want them as our partners. We can then live alone. When the time comes when they leave us, if we have not contemplated this, our sexual desire will want to hold them close to us for a long, long time. So, when they do not stay with us, we will be lonely and sad, because we still long for them to be close. But if we have seen the unattractive aspects of their bodies, then

we will not want to be near them at all. This is what we call contemplating the body in order to develop wisdom.

We have to see that the body is impermanent, that it must grow old, get sick, and die. We have to see that the physical body is not beautiful, is not us, and that there is no self in a body. The body is just a compilation of earth, water, wind, and fire. Everything in the body is made up of earth, water, wind, and fire, which we get from the food we eat. Our food, such as rice, vegetables, and meat, all are made up of earth, water, wind, and fire. So everything in our body is in essence just earth, water, wind, and fire, and one day these will separate and return to their original condition.

This is how we observe the body to teach the mind the truth, so that it will not cling to the body and be deluded into thinking that it belongs to us, that it should stay with us for a long time, or that other people should always stay with us to bring us happiness. Actually, other people are not beautiful like we usually believe. We do not look at the aspects that are not beautiful. We look

only at the beautiful side, which arouses sexual interest and makes us want to enjoy being with them or live close to them. But there are drawbacks to living with someone. For example, when our partner leaves us and is no longer with us, we will then be unhappy living alone and will suffer a lot. So, then we'll have to find another partner to replace them. If that person dies, then we'll have to find yet another partner, and so we continue in this way, one partner after another. Even after we ourselves die, we will still return to this world to find another partner.

But if we have seen the unattractiveness of the body, we won't want to live with anyone. We won't even want our own bodies. Our bodies too are not beautiful. The bodies of everyone are all the same, with the same 32 parts, and their nature is such that they will all eventually become corpses. We look at things in this manner, so that we will not be deluded into loving and attaching to both the bodies of others and to our own. This is how to look at the body to give rise to wisdom. If we observe the body for the sake of developing mindfulness, then

we just observe the movements of the body. Don't allow the mind to think about anything else, so that it will not be distracted and will instead become calm and concentrated. There are two ways to pay attention to the body: either for the sake of mental concentration or to give rise to wisdom. However, initially in our practice, we have to be mindful of the body to achieve concentration before developing wisdom.

This is the way to practice, which must advance step by step. When the mind is calm, it will not be aware of anything that is happening to the body or the environment surrounding the body, such as various sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations. Sometimes, the mind may be aware of its senses, but it remains emotionless and equanimous. Regardless of what people say or do, we're not interested at all; we're engrossed in stillness and quietude. We just remain still and equanimous. This is called a mind that is in a state of calm or concentration (*samādhī*), of which there are two types. The first is total mental peace where awareness of the body completely disappears. All

sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations fade away, leaving only the awareness of knowing. The second type is incomplete mental calm, when the mind is peaceful, but is still receptive to its senses. However, it is not worried about what it experiences through the senses; it doesn't get involved. The senses merely concern the body. The mind lets them be according to their natural conditions. For example, when there is physical pain after sitting a long time, we don't feel that it hurts too much and can accept it.

This is the peaceful nature of concentration that we should leave be as long as possible, until the mind withdraws and start thinking about other things. At that point, we should direct these thoughts in such a way in order to teach the mind, so that it will understand the truth of the body. Rather than thinking about earning money or going out to eat or drink, we instead think about the fact that our bodies will eventually have to grow old, get sick, and die. In the same way, the physical bodies of the people we know and love will also have to grow old, get sick, and die, such as the bodies

of our father, mother, siblings, children, and of all our relatives and friends. We should think in this way. Think that their bodies are only earth, water, wind, and fire, and not really them. What is their real self is their mind, which does not die along with the body. When they die, we will not grieve, because we know that they did not really die. That which died was merely their representative. Their body is their representative, just like our body represents us. We are the mind and not the body, so when the body dies, we do not die along with it. Our mind still exists, but it must go on to one of the various realms.

If we still need a body, we will be born again in a new one. If we don't need a body, then we don't need to be born again. If we know that in reality having a body brings more harm than good, we will not want to get a new body, and so we will not need to be born again. Therefore, we will not have to suffer the way we do today. That's all there is to it. We practice to teach the mind to let go and to be able to live alone, because the mind will be extremely happy if it lives alone. If it lives

with this or that person, with this or that thing, then it will be troubled by them. If there is nothing, though, then there is nothing to trouble the mind.

Do you see? If you have children, you will have to suffer. Before you had children, you didn't have those kinds of problems. But now that you do, you suffer a lot. When your kids are good, you suffer in one way. When your kids are bad, you suffer in another. Whether they are good or bad, you still suffer just the same. If they are good, you fear that they will leave you. If they are bad, then they really cause you problems. If you don't have any children at all, then you can truly be at ease. Do you understand?

Glossary

The following is a list of *Pāli* and Thai words as used in the text with a brief translation and comment.

Ajaan, Ajahn: (Thai). Teacher; mentor. Equivalent to the *Pāli* ācariya.

Anāgāmī: Non-returner. Someone who has reached the third stage of enlightenment, the stage before Arahant. A person who has abandoned the five lower fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth, and who after death will appear in one of the *Brahma* worlds called the Pure Abodes, there to attain *Nibbāna*, never again to return to this world.

Anattā: Not-self; the truth that all phenomena are devoid of anything that can be identified as a ‘self.’ This means that none of the physical and mental components of personality (i.e. the five *khandhas*) make up an entity, either individual or collective, nor can a self-entity be found anywhere within the heart (*citta*).

Therefore, what is experienced as being an abiding self is no more than a phantom personality born of ignorance and delusion — inherently transient, unstable, and bound up with suffering.

Appanā: Full-absorption *samādhi*. In *appanā samādhi* the *citta* completely ‘converges’ to the very base of *samādhi*. Perceptions of body and mind totally disappear from awareness at that time, leaving only the essential knowing nature of the *citta* alone on its own. Clear, bright, and expansive, the *citta* simply “knows”. There is no object, no duality, just “knowing”. The previous sense of dividedness is replaced by a wholly unified mental state, and a feeling of pure and harmonious being that is so wondrous as to be indescribable. This is the advanced stage of *samādhi*.

Arahant: One who is worthy, one who has reached the ultimate state of *Nibbāna*.

Avijjā: Ignorance, in the form of blind unknowing.

Bhava: Becoming. States of being that develop first in the mind and can then be experienced as internal worlds and/or as worlds on an external level. There are three levels of becoming: on the sensual level, the level of form, and the level of formlessness.

Brahma (brahmasā): Celestial beings who inhabit the first three realms of the Fine Material World. Beings reborn into those sublime realms are said to have some experience with the meditative absorptions (*jhāna*). Consequently, *brahmas* have extremely refined bodies composed of pure light and experience extremely refined degrees of mental pleasure. When the good *kamma* that sent them to those realms is finally exhausted, these beings pass away and are reborn again somewhere else, in a realm of existence suitable to their remaining *kamma*.

Buddho: Supremely enlightened. A traditional epithet for the *Buddha*, *buddho* is a preparatory meditation-word (*parikamma*) that is repeated mentally while reflecting on the Buddha's special qualities. In its

simplest form, one focuses attention exclusively on the repetition of “*buddho*”, continuously thinking the word “*buddho*” while in meditation. One should simply be aware of each repetition of “*buddho, buddho, buddho*” to the exclusion of all else. Once it becomes continuous, this simple repetition will produce results of peace and calm in the heart.

Citta: That underlying essence of mind which manifests as feeling, memory, thought, and consciousness. In its pure state it is indefinable and beyond *saṃsāra*.

Dāna: Giving, making gifts.

Demerit: Bad, unskillful, corrupt.

Desanā: The teachings of Dhamma; Dhamma talks.

Deva; Devatā: An angel like being of the *Deva*-realms, which are immediately above the human realm.

Dhamma [Skt. dharma]: (1) Event; a phenomenon in and of itself; (2) mental quality; (3) doctrine, teaching; (4) *nibbāna*. Also, principles of behaviour that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, "Dhamma" (usually capitalized) is used also to denote any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha denotes both his teachings and the direct experience of *Nibbāna*, the quality at which those teachings are aimed.

Dukkha: Stress; suffering; pain; distress; discontent.

Ekagattārammana; Ekaggataarom: Singleness of preoccupation; "one-pointedness." In meditation, the mental quality that allows one's attention to remain collected and focused on the chosen meditation object. *Ekagattārammana* reaches full maturity upon the development of the fourth level of *jhāna*.

Jhāna: Various states of meditative absorption, including the four *rūpa* and the four *arūpa-jhānas*.

Kamma: Lit: “action”. But in Buddhism, action of the body, speech or mind, which has a moral content of good, bad or neutral. Such action brings back a corresponding result.

Kilesa: Defilement — *lobha* (passion), *dosa* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion) in their various forms, which include such things as greed, malevolence, anger, rancour, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, miserliness, dishonesty, boastfulness, obstinacy, violence, pride, conceit, intoxication, and complacency.

Kruba: Phra or *Bhikkhu*, (Isan) North-Eastern Thai form of address for a junior monk.

Luangpu; Luangpor: Central Thai word for Venerable Father.

Luangta: Venerable Grandfather.

Magga: Path. Usually refers to the Eight-fold Path leading to *Nibbāna*.

Māna: Conceit.

Merit: Good, virtuous, skilful.

Nibbāna: The ultimate goal of Buddhist training. Lit: “Extinguished”.

Nirodha Samāpatti: The highest level of mundane meditative absorption (*Jhāna*) which is the cessation of all sensory experiences.

Pāḷi: The canon of texts (see *Tipiṭaka*) preserved by the *Theravāda* school and, by extension, the language in which those texts are composed.

Parikamma: Preparatory practice; preparatory meditation.

Parinibbāna: Final *Nibbāna* attained at the death of the Buddha or any of the *Arahants*.

Paṭipadā: Practice, mode of conduct.

Pāramī, Pāramitā: Perfection of the character. A group of ten qualities developed over many lifetimes by a *bodhisatta*, which appear as a group in the Pali canon only in the Jataka ("Birth Stories"): generosity (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), discernment (*paññā*), energy/persistence (*virīya*), patience/forbearance (*khanti*), truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), good will (*mettā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Paṭivedha: Direct, first-hand realization of the Dhamma.

Pariyatti: Theoretical understanding of Dhamma obtained through reading, study, and learning.

Sakkāya-diṭṭhi: Self-identification view. The view that mistakenly identifies any of the *khandha* as "self"; the

first of the ten fetters (*samyojana*). Abandonment of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is one of the hallmarks of stream-entry.

Sakadāgāmi: Once Returner. The second of the four stages culminating in becoming an Arahant. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth has weakened the fetters of sensual passion and resistance, and who after death is destined to be reborn in this world only once more.

Sālā: A meeting hall.

Samādhi: Absorption concentration, which has many levels and kinds.

Samāsāra: Transmigration; the round of death and rebirth.

Sammāsam Buddha: A fully Enlightened Arahant through his own effort.

Santosa: Having a sense of modesty; feeling content with what one has.

Sīla: Morality, moral behaviour.

Sotāpanna: Stream-enter; stream winner. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth and has thus entered the "stream" flowing inexorably to *Nibbāna*, ensuring that one will be reborn at most only seven more times, and only into the human realm or higher.

Taṇhā: Craving — for sensuality, for becoming, or for not-becoming.

Tathāgata: The "Thus gone", a title for the Buddha.

Ti-lakkhaṇa: Three characteristics inherent in all conditioned phenomena — inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

Vibhava: In *vibhava-taṇhā*: wanting to change, to become something different.

Vinaya: The bhikkhu's rules and the books containing them.

Viriya: Persistence; energy. One of the ten perfections (*pāramīs*), the five faculties (*bala*; *bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma*), and the five strengths/ factors (*indriya*; *bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma*).

Vipassanā: Clear intuitive insight into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear, seeing them for what they actually are — in and of themselves — in terms of the three characteristics (see *ti-lakkhaṇa*) and in terms of stress, its origin, its disbanding, and the way leading to its disbanding.

Related Websites for Further Reading

More teachings on Theravada Buddhism and the contemporary Thai Forest Tradition can be obtained from the following websites.

Recorded teachings of Ajaan Suchart Abhijato in English and Thai:

www.kammatthana.com

www.phrasuchart.com

English translation of Theravada *tipitaka* and a selection of teachings from the Thai Forest Meditation Masters:

www.accesstoinight.org

Translation in various languages of the teachings by Luangta Mahā Boowa:

www.forestdhamma.org